

Perceptions of the City through an Interpretation of Spatial Context

An exegesis submitted for
the degree of Doctor of Fine Art (DFA) - Professional Doctorate

Chan Hin Ming, Arthur

School of Art, College of Design and Social Context

RMIT University, Melbourne

November, 2012

DECLARATION

I certify that except where due acknowledgement has been made, the work is that of the author alone; the work has not been submitted previously, in whole or in part, to qualify for any other academic award; the content of the thesis is the result of work which has been carried out since the official commencement date of the approved research program; and; any editorial work, paid or unpaid, carried out by a third party has been duly acknowledged; ethics procedures and guidelines have been followed.

Arthur Chan

30, November, 2012

Acknowledgements

I must thank the following two people who gave me their time and support so unstintingly. Their involvement with my project, in numerous ways, was critical to its development and its satisfactory conclusion.

Associate Professor Kevin White,

Associate Professor Terry Batt.

Abstract

The rapid development of the city in the past century has brought drastic change in both social conditions and the appearance of the cityscapes. The conflict of urban intervention, alongside issues of habitation and the disappearance of old communities have inspired many contemporary artists in the creation of their artworks. As a practicing architect, I aim in this project to adopt an artist's identity to explore an alternative perception towards the cities of Hong Kong and Beijing where I live and work and which have logically become the primary subject matter in the development of my artworks. Beginning by strolling around the city with an intuitive visual perspective towards the old traditional neighbourhoods and newly developed districts in both cities, I aim to investigate the surrounding environment and the representational means regarding the city to underpin a solid foundation for the exploration and development of a new series of artworks in a spatial context. The artworks involve both interaction with the physical cityscape and transformation of the cityscape, and involve a range of art forms such as two-dimensional pictorial formats and three-dimensional sculptural objects within the context of abstract representation. Furthermore, the project will experiment with multi-reflection; multi-layering and an investigation of relationships between the solid and the void and the contrast of lighting and shadow in the development of the artworks.

Table of Contents

Declaration	i
Acknowledgements	ii
Abstract	iii
Table of Contents	iv
List of Figures	vii
Introduction	1
Chapter 1	
1.1 Introduction and Background	3
1.2 Research Related Questions	3
1.3 The City as Potential Subject Matter	3
1.3.1 City Development and Possible Forms of Settlement/Habitation	5
1.3.2 The Ideal City (Utopia)	8
1.3.3 Artwork as a Component of the City	11
1.3.4 The City as a Background to the City as a Core Subject Matter	12
1.3.5 The Perspective of the City in Contemporary Artworks	16
Chapter 2	
2.1 Referenced Local and Chinese Artist's Works	19
2.2 Hong Kong Local Artist - Warren Leung Chi-wo, 梁志和	19

2.3 Hong Kong Local Artist - Kacey Wong Kwok-choi, 黃國才	23
2.4 Hong Kong Local Artist - Danny Lee Chin-fai, 李展輝	30
2.5 Hong Kong Local Artist - William Lim Ooi-lee, 林偉而	33
2.6 Chinese Artist - Zhan Wang, 展 望	36
2.7 Chinese Artist - Chen Shaoxiong, 陳劭雄	43
2.8 Oversea Artist - Slinkachu	47
2.9 Summary	50

Chapter 3 Hong Kong and Beijing

3.1 History of Hong Kong	51
3.2 City Planning of Hong Kong	56
3.3 History and City Planning of Beijing	57
3.4 Generic City, Particular City	58

Chapter 4 Personal Studio Research

4.1 Background and Introduction	60
4.2 City Impression and Representation	61
4.2.1 Photos of Surrounding Environment	61
4.2.2 Photos of Skyscrapers	64
4.2.3 Photos of Waterfronts	66
4.2.4 Map	68
4.3 Possible Art Forms	70

4.3.1 Interacting with Cityscape	71
4.3.2 Transforming the Cityscape	75

Chapter 5 Conclusion

Summary	88
---------	----

5.1 Why and How does the city become a subject matter for the creation of art?	88
--	----

5.2 What are the possible representational art forms that can be derived from the context of the city and urban environment?	89
--	----

5.3 What messages are embodied in the artworks for the viewers to perceive?	90
---	----

Bibliography	92
---------------------	-----------

List of Figures

- Fig. 1. Artist(s) unknown, *The Ancient Chinese Village*, date unknown.
- Fig. 2. Ambrogio Lorenzetti, *A Tuscan Town*, about 1340, Picture Gallery, Siena.
- Fig. 3. Artist(s) unknown, *The Passage de l'Opera*, 1822-1823. Courtesy of the Musee Carnavalet, Paris. Photo copyright of Phototheque des Musees de la Ville de Paris.
- Fig. 4. Le Corbusier, *Site Plan of Contemporary City for Three Million Inhabitants*.
- Fig. 5. Artist(s) unknown, *Vitruvius Ideal City Planning I*, date unknown.
- Fig. 6. Artist(s) unknown, *Vitruvius Ideal City Planning II*, date unknown.
- Fig. 7. Zhou LI Kao Gung Gi (周禮考工記), *The Ideal City in Zhou Dynasty*.
- Fig. 8. Artist(s) unknown, *City Component Derived from Chinese Ideal City Planning*, date unknown.
- Fig. 9. Artist(s) unknown, *The Ancient Chinese Street*, date unknown.
- Fig. 10. Acropolis, Athens.
- Fig. 11. Carlo Crivelli, *Annunciation with St. Emidius*, 1486, oil on wood transferred to canvas, 207 x 146.5 cm, collection of National Gallery, London.
- Fig. 12. Johannes Vermeer, *View on Delft*, 1660-61, oil on canvas, 98.5 x 117.5 cm, collection of Royal Picture Gallery, Mauritshuis Museum
- Fig. 13. Claude Monet, *Houses of Parliament, London*, 1900-1901, oil on canvas, 81 x 92 cm, collection of Art Institute of Chicago.
- Fig. 14. Claude Monet, *Houses of Parliament, Sunset*, 1902, oil on canvas, 81.6 x 93 cm, private collection.

- Fig. 15. Claude Monet, *London, Houses of Parliament, The Sun Shining through the Fog*, 1904, oil on canvas, 81.5 x 92.5 cm, collection of Musee Orsay.
- Fig. 16. Claude Monet, *The Houses of Parliament (Effect of Fog)*, 1903 and 1904, oil on canvas, 81.3 x 92.4 cm, collection of Metropolitan Museum of Art.
- Fig. 17. Claude Monet, *Houses of Parliament Sunlight Effect*, 1903, oil on canvas, 81.3 x 92.1 cm, collection of Brooklyn Museum.
- Fig. 18. Claude Monet, *The Houses of Parliament Sunset*, 1903, oil on canvas, 81.3 x 92.5 cm, collection of National Gallery of Art.
- Fig. 19. Piet Mondrian, *Broadway Boogie Woogie*, 1942-43, oil on canvas, 127 x 127 cm, collection of Museum of Modern Art, New York.
- Fig. 20. Zhang Dali, *Dialogue: Forbidden City*, Beijing, 1998.
- Fig. 21. Yin Xiuzhen, *Portable Cities: San Francisco*, 2003, suitcase, clothes, city map, light, audio, 82 x 150 x 90 cm.
- Fig. 22. Leung Chi-wo, *East 22-Lexington*, 1999, C-print, Triptych, 28 x 35 cm each, artist's collection.
- Fig. 23. Leung Chi-wo, *Park-East 28*, 1999, C-print, 76 x 120 cm, artist's collection.
- Fig. 24. Leung Chi-wo, *800 Persons at 15 West 26*, 2000, plastic figures on mirror, diameter 32 cm, artist's collection.
- Fig. 25. See Fig. 24.
- Fig. 26. Leung Chi-wo, *Crossing Sky*, 2001, tables, cloth, artist's collection.
- Fig. 27. Leung Chi-wo, *Crossing Sky Chandelier*, 2001, artist's collection.
- Fig. 28. Leung Chi-wo, *City Cookies Is Served as a Performance with Greetings Such as 'Would You Like a Piece of Sky?'* 2001, performance.

- Fig. 29. See Fig. 28.
- Fig. 30. Kacey Wong Kwok-choi, *Cave Man*, 2000, plastic figurines, colored plaster, wood, lighting, 150 x 92 x 92 cm , artist's collection.
- Fig. 31. Kacey Wong Kwok-choi, *When Is The Exact Moment Dreams Become Reality?*, 2002, wood and paint, 300 x 300 x 300 cm, collection of Hong Kong Museum of Art.
- Fig. 32. Kacey Wong Kwok-choi, *Standing Next to the Harbour Front Alone*, 2000, painted mild steel rod, 100 x 800 cm, artist's collection.
- Fig. 33. Kacey Wong Kwok-choi, *Drift Cities, Kyoto, Japan*, 2000, performance, artist's collection.
- Fig. 34. Kacey Wong Kwok-choi, *Memory of the Forest- Deer*, 2009, recycled wood, artist's collection.
- Fig. 35. Kacey Wong Kwok-choi, *Memory of the Forest- Bear*, 2009, recycled wood, artist's collection.
- Fig. 36. Kacey Wong Kwok-choi, *Wandering Home*, 2008, wood, metal sheet, tricycle, paint, 278 x 220 x 290 cm, artist's collection.
- Fig. 37. Kacey Wong Kwok-choi, *Famiglia Grande (Grand Family)*, 2009, wood, metal plate, leather, spray paint, dimension various, artist's collection.
- Fig. 38. Kacey Wong Kwok-choi, *Paddling Home*, 2009, wood, ceramic tiles, aluminium windows, stainless gate, pipes, plastic barrels, 220 x 290 x 278 cm, artist collection.
- Fig. 39. Kacey Wong Kwok-choi, *Building making Building Workshop*, 2001.
- Fig. 40. Kacey Wong Kwok-choi, *Instant Skyline Workshop*, 2011.

- Fig. 41. Lee Chin-fai, *Scenery*, 2003, stainless steel, ink on rice paper, wood, 36 x 300 x 200 cm, artist's collection.
- Fig. 42. Lee Chin-fai, *City-landscape-rock (1)*, 2006, stainless steel, 110 x 70 x 190 cm, artist's collection.
- Fig. 43. Lee Chin-fai, *A Dewdrop*, 2005, stainless steel, black stone, 400 x 260 x 130 cm, collection of The Airport Authority Hong Kong.
- Fig. 44. William Lim, *Citic Tower*, UV print on canvas, 120 x 90 cm, 2005, artist's collection.
- Fig. 45. William Lim, *Ladders Bamboo Installation*, Venice Biennale's International Architectural Exhibition, 2006.
- Fig. 46. William Lim, *Illegal structure*, 2009.
- Fig. 47. Zhan Wang, *Artificial Stone No. 71*, 2005, stainless steel, 185 x 165 x 100 cm, collection of the Hong Kong Quarry Bay MTR station .
- Fig. 48. Lin Youlin, *The Suyuan Stone Catalogue*.
- Fig. 49. Zhan Wang, *Urban Landscape, Beijing Impression*, 2001, Photographed at the Agricultural Exhibition Hall, Beijing.
- Fig. 50. Zhan Wang, *Urban Landscape: Buffalo*, 2005, Photographed at the Anderson Museum, University of Buffalo.
- Fig. 51. Zhan Wang, *Urban Landscape on Display at Guangdong Museum of Art*, 2003.
- Fig. 52. Zhan Wang, *Installation of Urban Landscape: Beijing*, 2007, Photographed at the Williams College Museum of Art.
- Fig. 53. Zhan Wang, *Installing Urban Landscape: London*.

- Fig. 54. Zhan Wang, *Urban Landscape in London*.
- Fig. 55. Zhan Wang, *Artificial Rock No. 5*, 1997, stainless steel, 162 x 45 x 42 cm, in front of South Sliver Tower, Beijing.
- Fig. 56. Zhan Wang, *Artificial Rock No. 5 with Flower in the Mirror Series*, collection of Stanford University, Cantor Center for the Arts, Palo Alto, California, photography by Britta Erickson.
- Fig. 57. See Fig. 56.
- Fig. 58. Chen Shaoxiong, *Streetscape*, 2005, cut out photos on cardboard, artist's collection.
- Fig. 59. Chen Shaoxiong, *Streetscape*, 2005, cut out photos on cardboard, artist's collection.
- Fig. 60. Chen Shaoxiong, *Street, Opera, Paris*, 2004, cut out photos on cardboard, artist's collection.
- Fig. 61. Chen Shaoxiong, *Street, Zurich*, 2005, cut out photos on cardboard, artist's collection.
- Fig. 62. Chen Shaoxiong, *Street, Brussels*, 2001, cut out photos on cardboard, artist's collection.
- Fig. 63. Slinkachu, *They're not pets, Susan*, 2007, artist's collection.
- Fig. 64. Slinkachu, *After the storm*, 2008, artist's collection.
- Fig. 65. Slinkachu, *Hung up*, 2007, artist's collection.
- Fig. 66. Slinkachu, *Office politics*, 2006, artist's collection.
- Fig. 67. Monsignor Simeone Volonteri, *Map of Hong Kong*, 1686, colored lithograph, 92 x 114 cm, collection of Hong Kong Museum of Art History.

- Fig. 68. Artist unknown, *Waterfront, Central, Hong Kong*, 1870, printed photo, collection of Hong Kong Museum of History.
- Fig. 69. Artist unknown, *Waterfront, Central, Hong Kong*, 1880, printed photo, collection of Hong Kong Museum of History P68.148.
- Fig. 70. Artist unknown, *Wellington Street, Central, Hong Kong*, 1880, printed photo, collection of Hong Kong Museum of History.
- Fig. 71. Osbert Chadwick, *Plan of the City of Victoria*, 1882, colored lithograph, 32 x 90 cm, collection of Hong Kong Museum of History.
- Fig. 72. Artist unknown, *Queens Road, Central District, Hong Kong*, 1950, printed photo, collection of Hong Kong Museum of History P71.59.
- Fig. 73. Artist unknown, *A Qing Map of Beijing*, woodcut hanging scroll, 108.5 x 63.5 cm, collection of National Library of China.
- Fig. 74. City Photo, Hong Kong.
- Fig. 75. City Photo, Beijing.
- Fig. 76. City Photo, Beijing.
- Fig. 77. City Photo, Beijing.
- Fig. 78. Study of Daylighting
- Fig. 79. Skyscraper in Hong Kong.
- Fig. 80. Skyscraper in Beijing.
- Fig. 81. Skyscraper. Photographic composition.
- Fig. 82. Map of The Central, Hong Kong showing the original coastal line till 1979. Source from Zhang Zaiyuan and Liu Shaoyu, *A City Image of Central Hong Kong*, 1997.

- Fig. 83. Map of Wanchai, Hong Kong showing the original coastal line till 1982. Source from Wanchai District Board, 1992.
- Fig. 84. Segment of coastal line of Hong Kong.
- Fig. 85. Hong Kong Map.
- Fig. 86. Void pattern of Hong Kong Map.
- Fig. 87. Composition of void pattern form Hong Kong map.
- Fig. 88. Composition of void pattern form Hong Kong map.
- Fig. 89. City Pattern.
- Fig. 90. Arthur Chan, *Our City 1*, 2009, C print, each 20 x 30 cm, artist's collection.
- Fig. 91. Arthur Chan, *Our City 2*, 2009, C print, each 20 x 30 cm, artist's collection.
- Fig. 92. Arthur Chan, *Our City 3*, 2009, C print, each 20 x 30 cm, artist's collection.
- Fig. 93. Arthur Chan, *Our City 15*, 2009, C print, each 20 x 30 cm, artist's collection.
- Fig. 94. Arthur Chan, *Our City 16*, 2009, C print, 20 x 30 cm, artist's collection.
- Fig. 95. Arthur Chan, *Our City 17*, 2009, C print, 20 x 30 cm, artist's collection.
- Fig. 96. Arthur Chan, drawing of the artwork *Of Other Spaces 1* and *Of Other Spaces 2*, 2011, C print, 20 x 30 cm, artist's collection.
- Fig. 97. Arthur Chan, *Of Other Spaces 2*, 2011, Perspex, 35 x 32.5 x 41.5 cm, private collection.
- Fig. 98. Arthur Chan, *The World 2*, 2010, wood, paint, mirror, 30 x 10 x 20 cm, artist's collection.
- Fig. 99. The close-up photo of *The World 2*, 2010. (Information of the artwork, see Fig. 98)
- Fig. 100. The close-up photos of *Of Other Spaces 2*, 2011. (Information of the artwork,

see Fig. 97)

Fig. 101. Arthur Chan, *About Improvisation 4*, 2009, galvanized mild steel, Perspex, 210 x 40 x 210 cm, private collection.

Fig. 102. Arthur Chan, *About Improvisation 4-1*, 2010, wood, Perspex, 210x 40 x 210 cm, artist collection.

Fig. 103. The close-up photo of *About Improvisation 4*, 2009. (Information of the artwork see Fig. 101)

Fig. 104. Arthur Chan, *The Peripheral Space*, 2011, galvanized mild steel wiring, 150 x 250 x 40 cm, artist's collection.

Fig. 105. Arthur Chan, *The Edging Space*, 2011, galvanized mild steel wiring, 120 x 250 x 40 cm, artist's collection.

Fig. 106. Arthur Chan, *About Improvisation 5*, 2011, galvanized mid steel, marble, Perspex, 230 x 500 x 80 cm, private collection.

Fig. 107. Arthur Chan, *About Improvisation 6*, 2011, galvanized mid steel, wood, Perspex, 200 x 300 x 100 cm, artist's collection.

Fig. 108. Arthur Chan, *Of Other Spaces 3*, 2011, Perspex, 35 x 38 x 42.5cm, private collection.

Fig. 109. Close-up photo of *About Improvisation 5*, 2011. (for information on the artwork see Fig. 106)

Fig. 110. Arthur Chan, *The edging Space 2*, 2011, galvanized mild steel wiring, 100 x 80 x 60 cm, artist's collection.

Fig. 111. Close-up photo of *The Peripheral Space*, 2011. (for information on the artwork, see Fig.104)

Fig. 112 Close-up photo of *The Edging Space*, 2011. (for information on the artwork, see Fig.105)

Introduction

The city has not only appeared as a physical form for human settlement throughout the history of mankind, but has also been regarded as an art form within the context of the “Ideal City” (Utopia) which arose in both Western and Eastern civilizations more than 2000 years ago. After appearing mainly as background scenery to highlight religious figures that were the main subject matter of paintings of the Medieval and Renaissance period, the “city”, became a focus as subject matter for artworks from the 17th century, as can be seen in Dutch painting, Impressionist painting and well into the modern epoch. The representation of the appearance of a city then evolved from a descriptive method to an expressive technique that was further developed through abstraction. The modernization and rapid development of contemporary cities after WWII generated a range of social and economic issues, which subsequently provided a source of inspiration to many contemporary art practitioners. Various art forms including painting, photography, sculpture, installation and performance art were explored during this epoch.

The international metropolis of Hong Kong, became economically prosperous from the 1970's. From that time, high-density skyscrapers, became an increasingly common sight in the limited, urban downtown area. The uniform appearance of the buildings; the instant urban-scape with short-lived architecture along with the large scale reclamation of land from Victoria Harbour and the ensuing environmental concerns, have long been criticized. For many people, the over built new developments including mega shopping malls and the disappearance of the traditional residential districts, have had a negative impact on Hong Kong's livability. Many of Hong Kong's local art practitioners have

responded to and drawn inspiration from this city's environment and living conditions in the development of their art practice. Beijing, where I also live, has been praised as one of the oldest Chinese cities inheriting the largest imperial architectural complex, but Beijing also faces similar problems. The economic booms in the past twenty years have activated the property market and resulted in the large-scale construction of skyscrapers throughout the city. Many of the old courtyard houses are being destroyed at an alarming rate leading to a drastic change in Beijing's cityscape. Many mainland Chinese artists have also been alarmed by these phenomena and have embodied their reflections towards this modernization process in the development of their artworks. Whilst these artists' perceptions of the city, the techniques employed in their art-work and their use of a broad range of materials, provide a sound reference for this project, it is my intention to investigate what alternative perspectives can be further explored and developed. This is not only a process of researching the hidden unique character of the city, but also to provide a vital source of inspiration to the development of a new series of artworks that aim to find new ways of visually interpreting the city.

Chapter 1

1.1 Introduction and Background

The main objective of this research project is to investigate the city as potential subject matter in the development of a new series of artworks. The research project is neither an investigation of the historical development of the city and its specific architecture, nor the pursuit of the ideal form of city and architecture in our epoch, but rather, the study of how the city can inspire the creation and manifestation of contemporary artwork. A further objective is to study the possible art forms in a spatial context generated from the investigation of the urban environment and to gain a greater sense of understanding as generated from such art forms.

1.2 Research Related Questions

- How and why does the city become a focus as potential subject matter for the creation of art?
- What are the potential representations as art forms that can be derived from the context of the city and urban environment?
- What messages towards the perception of the cities are embodied in the artworks for the viewers to perceive?

1.3 The City as Potential Subject Matter

In this chapter, I aim to frame the discussion in the context of the development of a generic city from prehistory and then narrow the focus in order to discuss the specific characteristics of the city of Hong Kong and Beijing as developed historically in chapter

3. I have selected several contemporary local Hong Kong and mainland Chinese artists to study their artworks and their artistic interpretations and perceptions of the city in Chapter 2. The culmination of this research has influenced the development of my own artworks and I have illustrated this in Chapter 4. Hong Kong, where I was born, grew up, live and work, represents a natural and logical resource as the subject matter for my art practice. The rapid changes to the Beijing cityscape over the past two decades seem to follow a similar phenomenon that occurred in Hong Kong during the 1970's and 1980's. Both cities have witnessed the rapid disappearance of many older, established communities for redevelopment giving way to the emergence and proliferation of many skyscrapers, a phenomenon which has inspired my own studio practice.

To conduct a review of the evolution of the city in a historical context my investigation begins with a review of early human settlement and the reasons behind it. I will also study the form of the ideal city in Eastern and Western civilizations in order to reveal ideas of how people strive to create the best art forms for a city. Although the ideal city may never be able to be realized in mankind's history, the pursuit of the balance of order in both the empirical and cosmological world can deliver an insight into our ancestors. In the history of art development, people have tended to focus on art as a component of a city rather than the city itself. Therefore, sculptures, landmarks, cathedrals and temples are commonly found in every historical city as a manifestation of art. These develop the system of discourse for architecture and sculpture. The arrival of the industrial age in the 18th Century activated the emergence of cities, where factories were hastily built as a new means of production. A number of Impressionist

painters observed the cityscape as a major inspiration for their painting. This phenomenon continued in the modern and contemporary era without any respite, but with a greater variety of expression in the art forms and a wider spectrum of adopted media.

1.3.1 City Development and Possible Forms of Settlement/Habitation

All matters within a city can be interpreted as the inherited soul. The city is the collective memory of the citizens. –Aldo Rossi.¹

History reveals that humans started to gather and live together as a community in order

Image removed
due to copyright
restrictions

Fig.1. Artist(s) unknown, *The Ancient Chinese Village*, date unknown. (source from Chan, H.M., *The Commercial & Residential Intervention - The Revitalization of the Drum Tower Vicinity in Inner City of Xian* (Hong Kong: The University of Hong Kong, Department of Architecture, 1990), p. 36.)

to ensure the provision of basic physical needs, such as food and security. Dating back to the Old Stone Age (Paleolithic) period of 2,000,000 BCE to 10,000 BCE, human settlement appeared mainly in the form of villages. (Fig. 1) When humans gathered together near rivers or seas, they were mainly fishermen. When they gathered near a forest, they were mainly hunters. The binding force behind this arose from people having the same living patterns, sharing the same beliefs and having common feelings, desires and language. After the invention of agriculture, the notion of collective gathering became more stable as humans could settle down in one place rather than assuming a nomadic life style to secure a source of food. The form of

1. Rossi, Aldo, *The Architecture of the City*, Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press , 1982:15.

gathering commenced with villages and subsequently developed into cities when civilizations grew and developed. Nation, according to Ernst Cassirer (1874- 1945) was a political form that develops later in human history. Before that, humans are associated through similar feelings, desires and thoughts.²

In Western civilization, the city was developed from the Hellenistic and Roman empires, then via the Medieval to Renaissance and Baroque periods and finally to the modern contemporary epoch. (Fig. 2) In a more micro view, the development of the city had shifted from a more religious foundation to a stronger emphasis on social and economical considerations.³ Starting from the industrial revolution, cities began to

Image removed due to
copyright restrictions

Fig.2. Ambrogio Lorenzetti, *A Tuscan Town*, about 1340, Picture Gallery, Siena.
(source from Bacon, Edmund, *Design of Cities* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1978), p.93.)

expand rapidly, resulting in the decline of the village. People moved from villages to cities in search for work. Factories emerged and arcades (Fig. 3) appeared and people began to promenade in the city.⁴ The city became a hybridization of residential, commercial and recreational facilities. The large influx of villagers to the cities made living

-
2. Cassirer, Ernst, *An Essay on Man*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1944: 62.
 3. Rosenau, Helen, *The Ideal City in its Architectural Evolution*, New York, Methuen & Co. Ltd, 1983:1.
 4. See Benjamin, Walter, *The Arcades Projects*. Cambridge, Mass, Belknap Press, 1999:31-32. These arcades, a recent invention of industrial luxury, are glass roofed, marble-paneled corridors extending through the whole blocks of buildings...lining both sides of these corridors, which get their lighting from above, are the most elegant shops, so that the arcade is a city...in which customers will find everything they need...Until 1870, the carriage ruled the streets. On the narrow sidewalks the pedestrian was extremely cramped, and so strolling took place principally in the arcades, which offered protection from bad weather and from the traffic.

conditions difficult due to the overcrowding. Slum areas appeared and crime rates increased dramatically. Many architects developed new design concepts for city



Fig.3. Artist(s) unknown, *The Passage de l'Opera*, 1822-1823. Courtesy of the Musee Carnavalet, Paris. Photo copyright of Phototheque des Musees de la Ville de Paris. (source from Benjamin, Walter, *The Arcades Projects* (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press, 1999), p.49.)

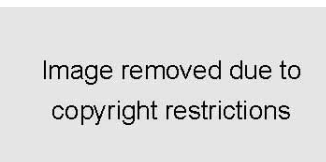


Fig.4. Le Corbusier, *Site Plan of Contemporary City for Three Million Inhabitants*. (source from *Le Corbusier Art and Architecture- A life of Creativity* (Tokyo: Mori Art Museum, 2007), p.174.)

planning in the early twentieth Century. Le Corbusier (1887-1965) suggested building a contemporary city for three million inhabitants with high-rise residential blocks and offices (Fig. 4). This laid down the basic development principle for the modern city with skyscrapers.⁵ In WWI and WWII, many cities were severely damaged or destroyed and over 50

million deaths were recorded during WWII. In order to rebuild the damaged cities and to cater for the post war baby boom, various governments laid down financial planning to strengthen economic growth and assist with the redevelopment of their cities. Cities expanded rapidly as a

result of economic growth during the decades since WWII.

The trend towards globalization in recent years has also been a dynamic driving force responsible for the development of cities.

5. See Foundation Le Corbusier, *Le Corbusier Art and Architecture- A life of Creativity*, Tokyo, Mori Art Museum, 2007:173 By vertically stacking the functions of housing and urban amenities that customarily extended horizontally, and then consolidating them into high-rises, Le Corbusier devised the means to secure open ground covered in greenery, which would allow more sunlight and air into the open spaces.

1.3.2 The Ideal City (Utopia)

A City should therefore adopt both plans of building: it is possible to arrange the houses irregularly...The whole town should not be laid out in straight lines, but only certain quarters and regions; thus security and beauty will be combined.

Barnes, Jonathan, *The Complete Works of Aristotle Volume Two- Politics*, Oxford: Princeton University Press, 1984: p.153. ⁶

In both Western and Eastern historical development, the city is the physical form of an ultimate realization of its civilization. The city is always related to culture and represents or incorporates a dynamic force of economic, social and cultural parameters.

People, understandably have the desire to attain a perfect physical environment and a satisfactory way of life. The Ideal City refers to this kind of unity and the expression of this aspiration. It seeks the universal and immortal value of unity. This expression is realized in religion, philosophy, art, architecture and even the city itself. The ideal city inevitably represents a religious vision, a secular view and a harmonious conception of artistic unity. This is the projection of a perfect image and an optimistic faith. It is based on the belief in betterment, seeking a universal answer to temporary problems.⁷

In Western civilization, the Hellenistic and Roman Empires had already laid down the

6. Barnes, J., *The Complete Works of Aristotle Volume 2- Politics*, Oxford, Princeton, 1984:153.

7. Rosenau, Helen, *The Ideal City in its Architectural Evolution*, New York, Methuen & Co. Ltd, 1983:2.

principles of the Ideal City. Usually, the city was located at the center of the country, an acropolis circled by an outer wall. The city was divided by either twelve (Plato:



Fig.5. Artist(s) unknown, *Vitruvius Ideal City Planning I*, date unknown. (source from Rosenau, Helen, *The Ideal City in its Architectural Evolution* (New York: Methuen & Co. Ltd, 1983), p. 14.)



Fig.6. Artist(s) unknown, *Vitruvius Ideal City Planning II*, date unknown. (source from Rosenau, Helen, *The Ideal City in its Architectural Evolution* (New York: Methuen & Co. Ltd, 1983), p. 15.)

Laws) or eight parts (Vitruvius: *De Architectura Libri Decem*).⁸ This geometrical pattern emphasized the relationship between man and the universe. Each part was further subdivided into smaller portions. Two basic mathematical geometric forms – the square and circle are found in harmonious juxtaposition to represent the ultimate perfection. These geometric, representational signs signify such pursuits in both Muslim and Eastern civilizations. Contemporary cities have also applied similar principles in city planning. (Fig. 5 and 6)

In China, the Ideal city was first codified in Zhou LI

Kao Gung Gi (周禮考工記)⁹ which was a famous doctrine formulating and underlying the principles for a perfect form of a city.

8. Ibid,14-15.

9. The original Chinese reads"方九里，旁三門。國中九經九緯，經塗(塗,道路)九軌。左祖右社,面朝後市。市朝一夫" The English translation is "The city should be in a square shape, 9 km long on each side and with three city gates. There should be 9 roads running North to South and East to West. The palace should be located at the center with the ancestral hall on the right, the hall for offices on the left and plaza at the front and the market at the rear".

(Fig. 7) The layout resembled a chessboard divided by a grid. There was a rigid requirement to have the palace located at the center, the ancestral hall on the right, the hall for the offices at the front and the market at the rear. The remaining city grid areas



are composed of residential quarters, which were enclosed by thick walls. Each residential unit was comprised of an open courtyard surrounded by individual units of living/sleeping quarters. (Fig. 8 and 9)

This was a spatial, transitional process from the political to the social, public to private and commercial to residential to achieve a hierarchical order. Chinese people believe that via the spatial disposition of the city form, universal harmony can be attained with a balanced order of political, social and ritual domains.

Fig.7. Zhou Li Kao Gung Gi (周禮考工記), *The Ideal City in Zhou Dynasty*.
(source from Chan, H.M., *The Commerical & Residential Intervention -The Revitalization of the Drum Tower Vicinity in Inner City of Xian* (Hong Kong: The University of Hong Kong , Department of Architecture, 1990), p. 36.)



Fig.8. Artist(s) unknown, *City Component Derived from Chinese Ideal City Planning*, date unknown.
(source from Chan, H.M., *The Commerical & Residential Intervention -The Revitalization of the Drum Tower Vicinity in Inner City of Xian* (Hong Kong: The University of Hong Kong , Department of Architecture, 1990), p. 36.)



Fig.9. Artist(s) unknown, *The Ancient Chinese Street*, date unknown.
(source from Chan, H.M., *The Commerical & Residential Intervention -The Revitalization of the Drum Tower Vicinity in Inner City of Xian* (Hong Kong: The University of Hong Kong , Department of Architecture, 1990), p. 36.)

The physical form of an “Ideal City” is more of a man-made and self-constructed entity, which could essentially be considered as an artwork. The Ideal City form has never physically appeared in human history. It is more an Ideal Form as it appears in Platonic philosophy.

1.3.3 Artwork as a Component of the City

The city is usually composed of buildings, streets, and open spaces and these physical components usually form the subject matter of the artwork rather than the city itself.



Fig.10. Acropolis, Athens.

Architecture such as temples, churches, cathedrals, piazzas and forums have long been regarded as an art form in human history and are defined as a school of study. People build monumental landmarks like the Acropolis (Fig. 10) in 500 BCE to establish a dialogue with nature and the gods. A single piece of architecture/landmark can be symbolically used to represent the whole city such as the Eiffel Tower in Paris, the Forbidden City in Beijing, and London Bridge in London. It is clearly stated in Aldo Rossi's book *The Architecture of the City* that architecture came into being along with the first traces of the city; it is deeply rooted in the formation of civilization and is a permanent, universal, and necessary artifact.¹⁰

10. Rossi, Aldo, *The Architecture of the City*, Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press , 1982:21.

1.3.4 The City as a Background to the City as a Core Subject Matter

The main subject matter in the development of painting in western civilization has undergone many changes since Greek times. From a primary concern with myths during the Greek era, through to religious concerns during Medieval times, to the Heroic and the depictions of everyday life as represented in Dutch painting during the 1600's.

Images of the city or town can be found in some Medieval and Renaissance painting. During this time, however, the city was not necessarily the primary subject matter of the artist but served the purpose of a background structure. The main subject matter at



Fig.11. Carlo Crivelli, *Annunciation with St. Emidius*, 1486, oil on wood transferred to canvas, 207 x 146.5 cm, collection of National Gallery, London. (source from <http://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/carlo-crivelli-the-annunciation-with-saint-emidius>)

that time was primarily religious. The power of religion is revealed through images of the Jesus figure/Holy Angel. In Carlo Crivelli's (1435-1495) painting – *Annunciation with St. Emidius* (Fig. 11), the ordinary people and the city took on a subordinate and subdued position. The intense power of religion lasted until well into the 17th Century until Descartes (1596-1650) and Voltaire's (1694-1778) thought spread throughout Europe. Descartes' rational assertion of "I think, therefore I am", ¹¹ heralded the arrival of the Age of Enlightenment where people developed a rational approach to thinking and investigated the world/city in

11. See Rene Descartes, *Discourse on the Method*, Part IV, 1637. The original text is in Latin Cogito ergo sum which translated to I think, therefore I am in English.

order to define tangible systems for the collection and implementation of knowledge. The world/city becomes the subject matter of human thought and its physical appearance was represented in their artworks. Dutch painting of this period frequently depicted the household and daily objects, as well as both suburban and urban landscape environments. These paintings recorded the city/environment in a descriptive manner, which they believed was a representation of reality. This can be



Fig.12. Johannes Vermeer, *View on Delft*, 1660-61, oil on canvas, 98.5 x 117.5 cm, collection of Royal Picture Gallery, Mauritshuis Museum.
(source from Quentin Buvelor, Titus M. Eliens, Epcó Runia, Ariane van Suchtelen, *Masters From the Mauritshuis* (The Hague: Royal Picture Gallery Mauritshuis Foundation, 2012), p. 92.)

seen in the work of Johannes Vermeer's (1632-1675) painting, *View on Delft* (Fig. 12) in which the painting appears like a photographic depiction of a city. When the city is treated as an object in its own right, we find artists examining its properties and the state under different conditions and expressing them through their art practice.

With the arrival of the Industrial Revolution (1750-1850), factories were built and city development was essential to cater for the influx of people from rural villages. The construction of arcades, street gas lighting, street furniture and coffee shops in the 19th Century provided an opportunity for people to promenade and enjoy activities outside

their homes.¹² In this regard, the city became popular as subject matter for painting in the 19th Century. The change of the city's color, mood, and texture under different lighting conditions was a common motif for many artists of that time. Claude Monet (1840-1926), for example, made numerous paintings showing the different appearance of the city of London under different lighting conditions. (Fig. 13,14,15,16,17 and 18) Painters of this epoch started to create paintings that expressed their personal feelings and sensations towards this particular subject matter. A single painting could no longer simply depict the appearance of the city anymore.



Fig.13. Claude Monet, *Houses of Parliament, London*, 1900-1901, oil on canvas, 81 x 92 cm, collection of Art Institute of Chicago. (source from <http://www.artic.edu/aic/collections/artwork/16584>)



Fig.14. Claude Monet, *Houses of Parliament, sunset*, 1902, oil on canvas, 81.6 x 93 cm, private collection. (source from <http://www.art.com/products/p9788614681-sa-i5578148/monet-houses-of-parliament-sunset-1902.htm>)

12. See Benjamin, Walter, *Reflections: Paris, Capital of Nineteenth Century*, New York, Schocken Books , 2007,146-147, Most of the Paris arcades are built in the fifteen years following 1822...The arcades are the scene of the first gas lighting... the city assumes a structure that makes it -- with its shops and apartments-- the ideal backdrop for the flaneur.

Image removed
due to copyright
restrictions

Fig.15. Claude Monet, *London, Houses of Parliament, The Sun Shining through the Fog*, 1904, oil on canvas, 81.5 x 92.5 cm, collection of Musee Orsay.
(source from http://www.musee-orsay.fr/en/collections/works-in-focus/painting/commentaire_id/london-houses-of-parliament-3040.html?cHash=f3cd34f147)

Image removed
due to copyright
restrictions

Fig.16. Claude Monet, *The Houses of Parliament (Effect of Fog)*, 1903 and 1904, oil on canvas, 81.3 x 92.4 cm, collection of Metropolitan Museum of Art.
(source from <http://www.metmuseum.org/Collections/search-the-collections/437128>)

Image removed
due to copyright
restrictions

Fig.17. Claude Monet, *Houses of Parliament Sunlight Effect*, 1903, oil on canvas, 81.3 x 92.1 cm, collection of Brooklyn Museum.
(source from http://www.brooklynmuseum.org/exhibitions/european_paintings/monet.php)

Image removed
due to copyright
restrictions

Fig.18. Claude Monet, *The Houses of Parliament Sunset*, 1903, oil on canvas, 81.3 x 92.5 cm, collection of National Gallery of Art.
(source from http://arthistory.about.com/od/from_exhibitions/ig/chester_dale_collection/cdc_nga_2010-11_53.htm)

The city continued to appear as subject matter for many artists during the 20th Century and is expressed through various art forms including painting, photography and film. The invention of photography (1839) and film (1893) provided new media for artists to explore. Film-makers also examined the impact of the development of the city, in

particular, machinery on human life, in such films as *Metropolis* directed by Fritz Lang in 1927. The appearance of the cityscape had another form of representation during this epoch. This is best illustrated in the abstract painting entitled *Broadway Boogie Woogie* by Piet Mondrian (1872-1944). (Fig. 19) In this painting, the physical form of the city was transformed into a geometrical pattern and expressed as a formal pictorial composition in a purely abstract context. Mondrian used straight lines and geometry to represent his impression of New York. The yellow cabs in New York inspired him to use yellow dots and lines to represent a kind of rhythm and spatial disposition.



Fig.19. Piet Mondrian, *Broadway Boogie Woogie*, 1942-43, oil on canvas, 127 x 127 cm, collection of Museum of Modern Art, New York.

(source from
http://www.moma.org/collection/object.php?object_id=78682)

1.3.5 The Perspective of the City in Contemporary Artworks

The drastic changes in the social conditions, including the economic and political circumstances of many cities after WWII had an unprecedented impact on people compared with earlier periods in mankind's history. The advent of commercial aviation and the boom in airport construction markedly reduced the travelling time between different cities, resulting in the spread of globalization throughout the entire world.

While most developing cities, particularly those in South East Asia and China have a similar appearance through the construction of skyscrapers, old cities face re-development along with the demolition of traditional architecture and residential settlements. Rem Koolhaas, the renowned Dutch architect and theorist, observes the inevitable trends towards 'verticality' with the skyscraper looking as though it will be the final, definitive, typology.¹³ The destruction and construction has shaped the city skyline and it is a continuous phenomenon between these two states. Disappearance of traditional architecture and residential settlement is a replacement and substitution of another cityscape form. Ackbar Abbas, a Hong Kong native and scholar, wrote 'any description then that tries to capture the features of the city will have to be, to some extent at least, stretched between fact and fiction... A spatial history of disappearance will attempt to evoke the city rather than claim to represent it, in the sense of giving a definitive account of what it is really like.'¹⁴ Many of these phenomena are reflected in the work of contemporary artists, such as Richard Serra (b.1939), Tadashi Kawamata (b. 1953), Olafur Eliasson (b. 1967) and Sarah Morris (b. 1967). Their work frequently questions the development of the city from a range of perspectives including environmental, social, political, historical and economical circumstances. Their work is not limited to traditional forms of art expression such as sculpture or painting, but also integrates performance and installation. The conflict of urban intervention, the habitation and the private/public domain are common topics in their artwork. The

13. Koolhaas, Rem and Mau Bruce, *Small, Medium, Large, Extra Large*, New York, The Monacelli Press Inc. 1995: 1250-1253.

14. Ackbar Abbas, *Hong Kong – Culture and the Politics of Disappearance*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1997: 15

transformation of the Beijing cityscape inspired the artist Zhang Dali 張大力 (b. 1964) to undertake a long series of anonymous, guerrilla-art actions. He spray-painted his own bald-pated profile on the wall of the old alleyways in the hutongs¹⁵ that were going to be demolished for re-development. (Fig. 20) Another artist, Yin Xiuzhen 尹秀珍 (b. 1963), developed pop-up fabric versions of cityscapes of different cities such as Beijing, Shanghai and San Francisco, which were made from the old clothes of their residents. She used the clothes as a tangible symbol of the moving spirit of contemporary life. The suitcase becomes the life support container of modern living and symbolizes the transient nature of living conditions in many contemporary cities. (Fig. 21) Urbanization seems to have become a seminal part of most artists' lives in the 21st Century.



Fig.20. Zhang Dali, *Dialogue: Forbidden City*, Beijing, 1998.
Vine, Richard, *New China New Art* (London: Prestel Publishing Ltd., 2008), p. 96.
(source from Vine, Richard, *New China New Art* (London: Prestel Publishing Ltd., 2008), p. 96.)



Fig.21. Yin Xiuzhen, *Portable Cities: San Francisco*, 2003, suitcase, clothes, city map, light, audio, 82 x 150 x 90 cm.
Vine, Richard, *New China New Art* (London: Prestel Publishing Ltd., 2008), p. 69.
(source from Vine, Richard, *New China New Art* (London: Prestel Publishing Ltd., 2008), p. 69.)

15. Hutongs (胡同) refers to narrow streets or alleys in Beijing. Hutongs are alleys formed by lines of traditional courtyard houses. Since the 1950' s, the number of Beijing hutongs has dropped dramatically as they are demolished for new development in the new communist China era.

Chapter 2

2.1 Referenced Local and Chinese Artist's Works

Following the study of the development of a generic city and the influence of the city as a form of subject matter for artworks over various epochs as outlined in Chapter 1, this chapter will analyze the work of a number of contemporary local Hong Kong, mainland Chinese and overseas artists that are of relevance to the development of this project.

The conceptual focus of these artists in the assimilation of their artworks and the skills they have employed in its construction have been influential in the development of this project.

2.2 Hong Kong Local Artist - Warren Leung Chi-wo, 梁志和

Warren Leung Chi-wo (b. 1968) received his Bachelor in Fine Arts and Master in Fine Arts from the Chinese University of Hong Kong in 1990 and 1997 respectively. He also completed a Post-Diploma in the Culture of Photography in Italy in 1991.

Leung's work began to reference the city as a resource for his subject matter when he visited New York City in 1999. As a stranger in New York he was able to examine the city from the objective perspective of an outsider. The historical or culturally imbedded meaning inherent in each major landmark didn't resonate with any particular significance for him, allowing him to have a totally different perception of the city compared with local New Yorkers.

Leung viewed the city not as it would be seen at the normal eye level of a pedestrian, but as a panoramic view point from the ground, as a worm might look up into the sky. This alternative perspective to view the architectural cityscape erased issues such as historical significance, cultural meaning and the articulation of design. The series of photographic images he created of the cityscape revealed both positive and negative spaces and abstract images of mass and void cityscapes. Familiar three-dimensional landmarks were transformed into unfamiliar two-dimensional pictorial forms.




Image removed due to copyright restrictions

Fig.22. Leung Chi-wo, *East 22-Lexington*, 1999, C-print, Triptych, 28 x 35cm each, artist's collection. (source from <http://leungchiwo.com/color/color.html>)

In contrast to the norm of perceiving space based on positive form, Leung extracted a series of “negative spaces” from the skyline photos and transformed them into a pictorial context. (Fig. 22) The “negative space” was formed from the abstract shapes delineated by the silhouette of surrounding architectural structures and described by Leung as “there is always something new and unusual for us to discover”.¹⁶ Leung’s concept of “negative space” suggests a new subjective perspective for city dwellers to

16. Joyce Chan Wing-yee, *Warren Leung Chi-wo: Discovering Possibility, Towards the Global course of the Department of Fine Arts*, the University of Hong Kong, 2005.

view their lives and attempted to define a new identity for urban cities. His perception of the cityscape made use of the features of urban architecture to frame a unique sky-shape above the urban streets and expressed a new vision of the city. This perspective of the cityscape allowed the viewer to re-examine the architecture and space of their own city and provided an alternative view of daily life. The unique pictorial form/space turned the sky into landmarks and gave a particular graphic identity to a specific location.



Fig.23. Leung Chi-wo, *Park-East 28*, 1999, C-print, 76 x 120cm, artist's collection.
(source from <http://leungchiwo.com/color/color.html>)



Fig.24. Leung Chi-wo, *800 persons at 15 West 26*, 2000, plastic figures on mirror, diameter 32 cm, artist's collection.
(source from <http://leungchiwo.com/figures/figures.html>)



Fig.25. See Fig. 24.
(source from <http://leungchiwo.com/figures/figures.html>)

Leung has explored various art forms including photographic representation, sculpture and installation. His early works are, in the main, represented by digital, two-dimensional photographs, with an added coloring effect. Leung uses color filters to achieve the final color outcome during the printing process.¹⁷ (Fig. 23) Leung also employs different media as seen in his sculpture of 800 figures standing densely on the negative form (Fig. 24 and 25). This concept was further investigated through the production of chandeliers, tables and cookies based on the negative space in a variety of installation exhibitions shown in the 49th Venice Biennial in 2000. These included a coffee shop installation of 15 tables topped with images of the urban skylines of both Hong Kong and Venice (Fig. 26) and a chandelier (Fig. 27). The form of the negative sky was further transformed into cookies, which were offered for sale from a vending machine at the Biennial, providing a more direct engagement and interaction with the work. (Fig. 28 and 29)

Leung's works were not focused on the properties of texture and craftsmanship of one particular material, rather, a range of different materials were used to explore the same subject matter including paper, fabric and domestic objects like tables and food.

17. Leung Chi-wo, *Archive*, <http://leungchiwo.com/color/color.html>



Fig.26. Leung Chi-wo, *Crossing Sky*, 2001, tables, cloth, artist's collection. (source from <http://leungchiwo.com/crossing/crossing.html>)



Fig.27. Leung Chi-wo, *Crossing Sky Chandelier*, 2001, , artist's collection. (source from <http://leungchiwo.com/crossing/crossing.html>)

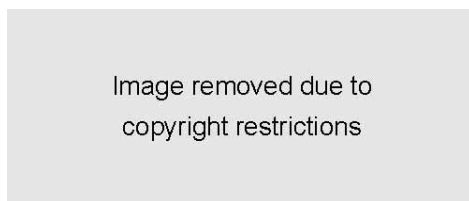


Fig.28. Leung Chi-wo, *City Cookies Is Served as a Performance with Greetings such as 'Would You Like a Piece of Sky?'* 2001, performance. (source from <http://leungchiwo.com/cookie/cookie.html>)



Fig.29. See Fig. 28. (source from <http://leungchiwo.com/cookie/cookie.html>)

2.3 Hong Kong Local Artist - Kacey Wong Kwok-choi, 黃國才

Kacey Wong Kwok-choi (b. 1970) studied architecture at Cornell University in New York City in 1994 and was a practicing architect for a number of years before changing his career to become an arts practitioner. He received his Master of Fine Arts from the Chelsea School of Arts and Design in London in 1998 with a specialization in sculpture

and installation. With his architectural background, his work investigated the poetics of space between people and the urban environment. He has continued to explore these issues of space for over ten years.

The city, including the urban environment and the problems of residential dwellings in Hong Kong, form the core subject matter in Wong's artworks and strongly relate to the local environment and community.¹⁸ His works range from installation, sculpture, photography, to public art and art workshops.

In Wong's earlier works, he constructed many box forms with the idea of looking at abstract painting. To Wong, these abstract paintings look like boxes or containers. A contrast of inside /outside and a play with external appearance and internal stories could be achieved.¹⁹ Small objects/figures were placed inside the boxes to set up a dramatic arena for viewing. By opening a fixed aperture in each box, the viewer is invited to observe different scenes with various narratives inspired by events within the city. Wong reconstructs these stories, which relate to his personal feelings, experiences and sensations. Such stories relate to the living conditions of many city dwellers, and can be seen in his work, '*Cave Man*'. (Fig. 30)

18. Kacey Wong, Kwok-choi, *Drift City*, Hong Kong, Object Factory, 2003.

19. Parasite Art Space, *Housewarming, Interview with Kacey Wong by David Ho Yeungchan*, Hong Kong, Parasite Art Space, 2003:39.



Fig.30. Kacey Wong Kwok-choi, *Cave Man*, 2000, plastic figurines, colored plaster, wood, lighting, 150 x 92 x 92 cm , artist's collection.
(source from <http://www.kaceywong.com/cityhome.html>)



Fig.31. Kacey Wong Kwok-choi, *When Is The Exact Moment Dreams Become Reality?*, 2002, wood and paint, 300 x 300 x 300 cm, collection of Hong Kong Museum of Art.
(source from <http://www.kaceywong.com/cityhome.html>)

In Wong's opinion, owning their own home is the ultimate pursuit for most Hong Kong people. They may use their whole life's savings to purchase a residential unit of a few hundred square feet, which may require a 20 year mortgage loan, or longer. A physical home unit can become both a dream and a nightmare. In his work '*When is The Exact Moment Dreams Become Reality?*' (Fig. 31), the houses were constructed in twelve different sizes in a linear arrangement from large to small. One can enter into the large house and look towards the smaller houses. Due to their small size, one can never enter the smaller ones at the far end. In this work Wong questions whether Hong Kong people can physically attain their dream home.²⁰

Wong is inspired by the cityscape in the work '*Standing Next to the Harbor Front Alone*'

20. Kacey Wong Kwok-choi, *Drift City*, Hong Kong, Object Factory, 2003.

Image removed
due to copyright
restrictions

Fig.32. Kacey Wong Kwok-choi, *Standing next to the Harbour Front Alone*, 2000, painted mild steel rod, 100 x 800 cm, artist's collection.
(source from <http://www.kaceywong.com/cityhome.html>)

(Fig. 32) where he explores the silhouette of the cityscape and transforms it with the use of steel to form a linear artwork specifically to enable blind people to be able to perceive/experience the cityscape outline by hand rather than visually. This interactive work provided the visually impaired with a means to experience the invisible city.

From 2000 Wong has conducted a series of performance artworks entitled, '*Drift Cities*' (Fig. 33). to explore a dialogue between himself and the city in which he aims to criticize the globalization of the skyscraper typology. Wong recounts how this project was inspired by William Van Alen, who dressed up as a Chrysler Building in the Beaux Arts Ball parties, in New York in 1931. The skyscraper is a symbol of high civilization and stands for modernization. However, Wong on the other hand has discovered that

Image removed
due to copyright
restrictions

Fig.33. Kacey Wong Kwok-choi, *Drift Cities, Kyoto, Japan*, 2000, performance. artist's collection.
(source from <http://www.kaceywong.com/drift.html>)

many local habitations and communities in many cities have been rapidly destroyed by the rampant construction of skyscrapers. He therefore dresses himself up as a skyscraper and travels from city to city documenting the performance through photography and video. The cities or places he selected to visit imbue the work with a surrealistic quality, or of having a strange story behind it, so that he could create a contrast with the "skyscraper man". This action seems to inject life into the skyscraper. The skyscraper is transformed to relate to a human scale which re-establishes the

relationship between humans and buildings in order to re-define the notion of reclaiming the city.²¹ His artworks are not intended as an isolated object for viewing, but rather as an extended apparatus of the artist's body. This performance plays an important role in his recent works establishing a strong bond between himself and his work to form a holistic representation.

The essence /memory of a city is also an inspiration for his artwork and can be seen in the work '*The Memory of the Forest*' (Fig. 34 and 35). The forest (which is often transformed into a city) provides a catalyst for him to use recycled wood (the basic component of a forest) to construct several animal forms (the original inhabitants of a jungle or forest) and to place these artworks in various locations within the city. To Wong, deforestation is a serious problem. Animals in the forest cannot adapt to the drastic change to their environment leading towards their inevitable extinction.²² The trees that once provided shelter for the animals are transformed into industrial products, then into garbage and ultimately buried as landfill within a very short period of time. He then makes use of the recycled wooden crates to construct various animals including a rabbit, bear, owl and deer and encourages the viewer to go inside the animal forms and look at the world from the animal's perspective. The artworks have been placed in various locations in the city centre such as the Star Ferry Terminal to arouse public awareness.

21. Kacey Wong Kwok-choi, *Artist's Project, Drift*, <http://www.kaceywong.com/drift.html>

22. Kacey Wong Kwok-choi, *Artist's Project, Remake*, <http://www.kaceywong.com/remake.html>

His philosophy regarding the city has focused more specifically on social and community issues in recent years. He questions how we live in this city and suggests alternative ways to search for a better way to live within it. This can be observed in

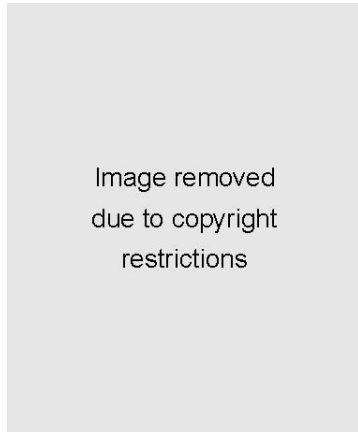


Fig.34. Kacey Wong Kwok-choi, *Memory of the Forest-Deer*, 2009, recycled wood, , artist's collection.
(source from <http://www.kaceywong.com/remake.html>)



Fig.35. Kacey Wong Kwok-choi, *Memory of the Forest-Bear*, 2009, recycled wood, artist's collection.
(source from <http://www.kaceywong.com/remake.html>)



Fig.36. Kacey Wong Kwok-choi, *Wandering Home*, 2008, wood, metal sheet, tricycle, paint, 278 x 220 x 290 cm, artist's collection.
(source from <http://www.kaceywong.com/wander.html>)

works such as '*Wandering Home*' (Fig. 36), '*Famiglia Grande*' (Grand Family) (Fig. 37) and *Paddling Home*. (Fig. 38) The '*Wandering Home*' project questions the typical ways we live in Hong Kong and suggests an alternative answer to this poignant question. In *Paddling Home*, he explores different types of dwelling units for Hong Kong people in various and diverse situations. This work is a tiny typical residential apartment block (4 feet x 4 feet) like a paddling boat floating on the sea. It provides a mobile, yet

compact place to live in this city. Wong further extends the idea of minimal dwellings and offers an alternative solution that serves to re-assess the living conditions in the city once again in his work '*Famiglia Grande*' (Grand Family). 'Famiglia Grande' is a



group of mobile sleeping units that enable a homeless family of 4 (2 adults and 2 children) to live off the urban streets as a temporary measure.

Fig.37. Kacey Wong Kwok-choi, *Famiglia Grande (Grand Family)*, 2009, wood, metal plate, leather, spray paint, dimension various, artist's collection.
(source from <http://www.kaceywong.com/wander.html>)



Fig.38. Kacey Wong Kwok-choi, *Paddling Home*, 2009, wood, ceramic tiles, aluminium windows, stainless gate, pipes, plastic barrels, 220 x 290 x 278 cm, artist's collection.
(source from <http://www.kaceywong.com/wander.html>)

In his earlier works Wong used simple and common building materials like plywood

and steel, whereas, recycled wood and the

reconstruction of daily objects are used in his

more recent works. Wong has also arranged

workshops such as the '*Building making*

Building' workshop, 2001 at the Hong Kong

Museum of Art (Fig. 39) and the '*Instant Skyline*'

workshop, 2011, at the West Kowloon

Reclamation Area. (Fig. 40) These projects were

interactive and viewers were invited to fabricate

their own model buildings out of glue and hewn

wood and to participate in a broader dialogue

concerning the social relevance of art. This

humanistic approach empowers the audience

and provides them with an opportunity to

envisage and construct their own image of the

city.²³

Image removed
due to copyright
restrictions

Fig.39. Kacey Wong Kwok-choi, *Building Making Building Workshop*, 2001.
(source from
<http://www.kaceywong.com/cityhome.html>)

Image removed
due to copyright
restrictions

Fig.40. Kacey Wong Kwok-choi, *Instant Skyline Workshop*, 2011.
(source from
<http://www.kaceywong.com/cityhome.html>)

2.4 Hong Kong Local Artist - Danny Lee Chin-fai, 李展輝

Danny Lee Chin-fai (b. 1949), graduated from the Swire School of Design, a precursor of the Hong Kong Polytechnic University in 1980 and began his profession as a

23. Kacey Wong Kwok-choi, *Drift City*, Hong Kong, Object Factory, 2003.

designer in Hong Kong. He then completed the Modern Sculpture Certificate Course organized by the Department of Extra-mural Studies from the University of Hong Kong in 1993 and then turned his focus to the role of full time sculptor. He established the "Creative Sculptors Hong Kong" and became its Founding Chairman in 1993. The relationship between the city and nature has been a recurring theme in his works over the last 20 years.

Lee considers the cityscape and landscape to be inseparable²⁴. His artwork references both the city and natural elements such as dewdrops, clouds and rivers in an abstract form of representation. These organic forms are presented individually or in groups and aim to enhance the textural quality of stainless steel and create an enhanced sense of space. He represents the city not in a physical form but in an intangible way through the reflections of the city on his highly polished forms. (Fig. 41 and 42)

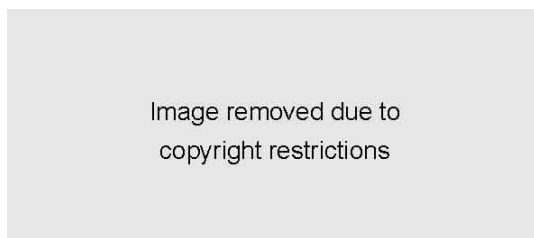


Fig.41. Lee Chin-fai, *Scenery*, 2003, stainless steel, ink on rice paper, wood, 36 x 300 x 200 cm, artist's collection. (source from Choi, Wing-sze, Alice, *Sculpture of Reflections. The Art of Danny Lee Chin-fai* (Hong Kong: Asia One Books, 2011), p.132.)



Fig.42. Lee Chin-fai, *City-landscape-rock (1)*, 2006, stainless steel, 110 x 70 x 190 cm, artist's collection. (source from Choi, Wing-sze, Alice, *Sculpture of Reflections. The Art of Danny Lee Chin-fai* (Hong Kong: Asia One Books, 2011), p.256.)

24. Choi, Wing-sze, Alice, *Sculpture of Reflections, The Art of Danny Lee Chin-fai*, Hong Kong, Asia One Books, 2011: 81.

In his artworks, Lee contemplates the reciprocal cause - effect relationship between man and the city environment. There is no separation between himself and his city surroundings. Through the unique reflective quality of his artworks, the city image is reflected both as an expression and impression; the mirrored surfaces generate images of the surroundings as well as reflections of their beholders. The duality of reality (positive and negative) is intricately manifested in his works.

Lee's sculptures are strongly influenced by Chinese ink painting. Mountains and water have been a recurring conceptual motif in his works. His artistic language and aesthetic sense is a crystallization of sculpture, design and ink art. Simple, fine, rhythmic and poetic lines comprise the core visual strength of his works.

His works always play with contrasting yet complementary visual elements, such as dynamic correlations of color, material, texture, object and subject; real and unreal; mass and void; negative and positive; static and mobile. He skillfully juxtaposes these divergent visual elements and succeeds in achieving a holistic balance between abstract and narrative; the tangible and intangible; the materialistic and the immortal dimension of being and existence.

Lee's artworks are constructed from a limited range of materials. This allows him a greater capacity to explore material possibilities and their potential application. His early work involved bronze, carving and casting with a later focus on stainless steel. Most of his works are constructed from highly polished and reflective materials such as stainless steel to reflect the physical world of cityscapes- a relationship with the

material and the environment.

An interesting dialogue is taking place between the viewer and the artwork. The viewer, when looking at the artwork, is not only reading the depiction of his/her reflected image, he/she has already become intrinsically part of the artwork itself, along with the cityscape. The interplay of subject and object creates an interesting dialogue




Image removed due to
copyright restrictions

Fig.43. Lee Chin-fai, *A Dewdrop*, 2005, stainless steel, black stone, 400 x 260 x 130 cm, collection of The Airport Authority Hong Kong.
(source from Choi, Wing-sze, Alice, *Sculpture of Reflections. The Art of Danny Lee Chin-fai* (Hong Kong: Asia One Books, 2011), p.74.)

through compelling the viewer to approach things from different perspectives in a more introspective way. Dewdrops reflect the viewer with a sense of calmness and clarity, a contemplative review of himself in the reflection. (Fig. 43) The viewer's visual engagement with the work is achieved through the distorted reflections on the shimmering surface.

The abstract representation of his artworks and their serene presence in various city locations provides numerous possibilities for interpretation.

2.5 Hong Kong Local Artist - William Lim Ooi-lee, 林偉而

William Lim received his Bachelor's degree (1980) and Master's degree (1981) in Architecture from Cornell University in America and subsequently practiced as an architect in Hong Kong. His work straddles the boundaries between architectural design and visual art within a local Hong Kong context. His installation works relate to

issues concerning architecture, habitation and the cityscape. He is currently the Co-Chairman of Para/Site Art Space.²⁵

Lim renders objects and space, manipulates exteriors and interiors, mixes unconventional materials and objects, and skillfully merges spiritual and functional worlds. His work embodies the essence of two different, yet inseparable disciplines of architecture and art with a rich, contemporary artistic language.

Lim considers the city to be a living entity that breathes, thinks and interacts. He represents this in one of his two-dimensional pictorial works entitled, "Citic Tower" (Fig. 44), where every building seems to have its own sense of life in the photographic

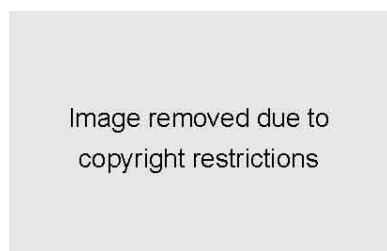


Fig.44. William Lim, *Citic Tower*, UV print on canvas, 120 x 90 cm, 2005, artist's collection.
(source from <http://www.grottofineart.com/WEB%20ARCHIVE/WilliamLim/054-0009.htm>)

representation. Lim employs his camera in varying degrees of focus in order to create a strong sense of the passage of time through the creation of a blurred image. When this digital image is printed on large sections of canvas, the resulting image possesses an inherently painterly quality that is rarely found in conventional photography.

25. Para/Site Art Space is a Hong Kong non-profit art organization which founded in 1996. It owns a gallery in Sheung Wan with exhibitions showcasing local and international contemporary art. Para/Site Art Space also issues publications of catalogues and organizes programmes, seminars, talks and workshops regularly.

Lim considers Hong Kong to be a hybridization of both traditional values and contemporary vibrancy and reflects such characteristics in his artwork. He re-examines the traditional bamboo hand knotting technique,²⁶ which is unique to Hong Kong and employs such emblematic techniques in the artwork entitled, “*Ladder Bamboo Installation*” which was exhibited at the Venice Biennale in 2006. (Fig. 45) Five hundred

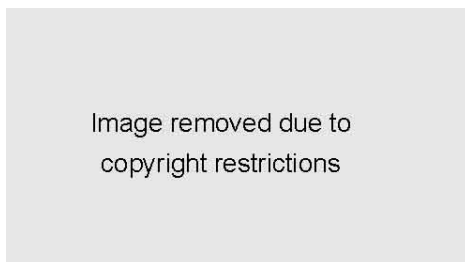


Fig.45. William Lim, *Ladders Bamboo Installation*, Venice Biennale's International Architectural Exhibition, 2006.

(source from <http://cl3.com/art/venice-biennale-2006/>)

bamboo ladders were tied together with this hand knotting technique, with 30 red neon light tubes hanging in-between. The black ladders are a symbol of Hong Kong's heritage while the neon lighting, common to the Hong Kong night scene, represents the city's energy and vibrancy.



Fig.46. William Lim, *Illegal structure*, 2009.

(source from Zhai, Danny Ed., *The 17th Asia Pacific Interior Design Awards* (Hong Kong: Metto International Ltd. 2009) p.53)

Lim employs mirrors extensively in his artworks, such as, ‘Illegal Structure’ (Fig. 46). The reflective property of the mirrors accentuates an extended spatial quality through repeated images and viewers are encouraged to enter and to interact with the artwork.

26. Bamboo hand knotting is a unique construction technique in Hong Kong to knit the bamboo to form scaffolding. It is very common in Hong Kong building industry because of its easy assembling and disassembling property.

2.6 Chinese Artist - Zhan Wang, 展望

ZHAN Wang (b. 1962) is amongst the most respected sculptors in China. He graduated from the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing in 1983 and his work has been concerned with the metamorphosis of Chinese urban cities since the advent of modernization in China. He adopts polished cast stainless steel as a major material in his work and evokes a witty dialogue between nature and the cityscape.

The variation in his artworks has strongly echoed the transformation of the city of Beijing over the past few decades. This is evidenced in the interview by 《Art Zine China》 in 2001 where Zhan mentioned, “The redevelopment of Beijing Wangfujin in 1993 embarked the arrival of the industrial age. My intuition told me most of the

Image removed due to
copyright restrictions

Fig.47. Zhan Wang, *Artificial Stone No. 71*, 2005, stainless steel, 185 x 165 x 100 cm, collection of the Hong Kong Quarry Bay MTR station .
(source from Zhan, Wang, *The New Suyuan Stone Catalogue* (New York: Charta Books Ltd, 2011), p. 69.)

traditional living patterns would change. The modernization of Beijing city in the early 1990's inspired me by using stainless steel-an industrial material in the making of artwork. The transformation of my artworks synchronized with the Beijing city development.”²⁷ Zhan makes use of stainless steel to transform the Suyuan rocks of a traditional Chinese landscape into graceful, contemplative sculptures,

27. Zhan, Wang, *The New Suyuan Stone Catalogue*, New York, Charta Books Ltd, 2011: 127.

Image removed
due to copyright
restrictions

which investigate the relationship between national scenery and the industrial and urban environment. (Fig. 47) The rock in China as listed in *The Suyuan Stone catalogue* (Fig. 48) has long been regarded as representing a miniature view of the natural landscape²⁸ and he aims to re-examine this world through his artworks.

Fig.48. Lin Youlin,
*The Suyuan Stone
Catalogue*.
(source from Zhan,
Wang, *The New
Suyuan Stone
Catalogue* (New
York: Charta Books
Ltd, 2011), p. 8.)

In 2001, Zhan moved from the Sanlitun²⁹ to the twentieth floor of the Atlanta building in Atlantic City in Beijing. At that time, I also lived in Atlantic City but on the third floor. When Zhan looked down on the new city of Beijing with skyscrapers and towers crowded in a panoramic view, it had a great impact on him, especially the destruction of the traditional Hutongs in old Beijing.

After 2001, he began to develop a series of artworks titled 'Urban Landscape' that used stainless steel dinnerware to construct miniature models of urban cityscapes. To Zhan, stainless steel dinnerware, a common readymade utensil, is the modern equivalent of traditional dinnerware due to its durability, and represents the embodiment of a

28. *The Suyuan Stone Catalogue* was compiled by Ming Dynasty author Lin Youlin (1578-1647) to record famous stone articles from the Southern Tang dynasty through the Ming dynasty.

29. Sanlitun is the bar street in Beijing and has been under almost constant regeneration since the late 20th century as part of a city-wide project of economic regrowth.

traditional daily implement of an industrial civilization.³⁰ The dinnerware, just like architecture, can be stacked together on different levels to give the appearance of an urban landscape form.

The urban landscape series was exhibited in a number of different cities including Beijing, Guangzhou, Shenzhen, London, Chicago and Buffalo (Fig. 49, 50 and 51). Zhan first travelled around each city, bought maps and used these impressions to compose an architectural landscape of each city. The process resembled painting a three-dimensional picture. He explored the endless reflective quality of this stainless steel dinnerware by placing several mountain forms, or stainless steel rocks as the background to these cities.

Lighting is also employed to create a glittering effect. All of these elements combine to form an extreme materialization of an urban scene, at once, unique in the world and yet also familiar.

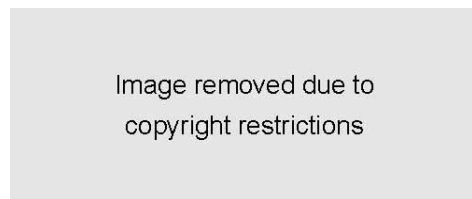


Fig.49. Zhan Wang, *Urban Landscape, Beijing Impression*, 2001, Photographed at the Agricultural Exhibition Hall, Beijing.
(source from Zhan, Wang, *The New Suyuan Stone Catalogue* (New York: Charta Books Ltd, 2011), pp. 128-129.)

30. Zhan, Wang, *The New Suyuan Stone Catalogue*, New York, Charta Books Ltd, 2011:127.

Image removed due to
copyright restrictions

Fig.50. Zhan Wang, *Urban Landscape: Buffalo*, 2005, Photographed at the Anderson Museum, University of Buffalo.

(source from Zhan, Wang, *The New Suyuan Stone Catalogue* (New York: Charta Books Ltd, 2011), p. 133.)

Image removed due to
copyright restrictions

Fig.51. Zhan Wang, *Urban Landscape on Display at Guangdong Museum of Art*, 2003.

Fig. 48. The Suyuan stone catalogue
(source from Zhan, Wang, *The New Suyuan Stone Catalogue* (New York: Charta Books Ltd, 2011), p. 130.)

In the urban landscape he constructed in Chicago, a stainless steel 'jiashanshi' (mountain range) appeared in the artwork, which, did not conform to the actual geography of Chicago as Chicago is built on flat land. However, Zhan does not set up to create an exact reproduction of the city's image, but rather to create an urban landscape in the artist's mind. Zhan placed mirrors at each of the four sides to further enhance the reflective qualities, which created the effect of a world metropolis of infinite horizons. (Fig. 52, 53 and 54)

Image removed due to
copyright restrictions

Fig.52. Zhan Wang, Installation of *Urban Landscape: Beijing, 2007*, Photographed at the Williams College Museum of Art.
(source from Zhan, Wang, *The New Suyuan Stone Catalogue* (New York: Charta Books Ltd, 2011), p. 126.)

Image removed due to
copyright restrictions

Fig.53. Zhan Wang, *Installing Urban Landscape: London*.
(source from Zhan, Wang, *The New Suyuan Stone Catalogue* (New York: Charta Books Ltd, 2011), p. 131.)

Image removed due to
copyright restrictions

Fig.54. Zhan Wang, *Urban Landscape in London*.
(source from Zhan, Wang, *The New Suyuan Stone Catalogue* (New York: Charta Books Ltd, 2011), p. 131.)

Zhan selects stainless steel as his major material because it represents a sense of the “modern” in contemporary China and is a material that never rusts. He uses this stainless steel to manufacture fake rocks. To Zhan, manufacturing presents a form of transformation.³¹ He explores the process of transforming stainless steel from a cold industrial material into a material that has an intrinsic sense of naturalistic appeal.

In the artwork titled “*Artificial Rock No. 5*”, (Fig. 55), Zhan places his stainless steel rocks in front of a skyscraper in Beijing³². The magical sheen and reflection express a quality of modern energy thus symbolizing an era of Chinese modernization. The curtain wall building,³³ is a kind of visual symbol of modern Chinese urban architecture as the building’s mirrored glass has come to be seen as representative of the ideal working and living environment. The polished surface of stainless steel acts as a mirror to reflect the viewer and their surroundings. Due to the uneven surface, the reflected image creates a distorted and abstract impression of the viewer and his/her surroundings.

31. Ibid.

32. Zhan, Wang, *The New Suyuan Stone Catalogue*, New York, Charta Books Ltd, 2011:85.

33. Curtain wall is an outer covering of a building in which the outer walls are non-structural. Glass is widely used as the curtain wall contemporarily to provide more natural lighting into the interior of the building.



Image removed
due to copyright
restrictions

Fig.55. Zhan Wang, *Artificial Rock No. 5*, 1997, stainless steel, 162 x 45 x 42 cm, in front of South Sliver Tower, Beijing.
(source from Zhan, Wang, *The New Suyuan Stone Catalogue* (New York: Charta Books Ltd, 2011), p. 84.)

Zhan has also explored two-dimensional artwork. His work ‘the Mirror Flower Garden’ (Fig. 56 and 57), consist of a series of photographic works with rocks embedded in the image. Due to the irregular form, the photographs capture the surrounding environment in a shifting and distorted form, just like an abstract graphic painting. The stone mirror transforms the three-dimensional, real, macrocosmic world into a miniaturized two-dimensional picture with similar aesthetic qualities.³⁴

34. Zhan, Wang, *The New Suyuan Stone Catalogue*, New York, Charta Books Ltd, 2011:86.



Image removed
due to copyright
restrictions

Fig. 56. Zhan Wang, *Artificial Rock No. 5 with Flower in the Mirror Series*, collection of Stanford University, Cantor Center for the Arts, Palo Alto, California, photography by Britta Erickson.

(source from Zhan, Wang, *The New Suyuan Stone Catalogue* (New York: Charta Books Ltd, 2011), p. 87.)

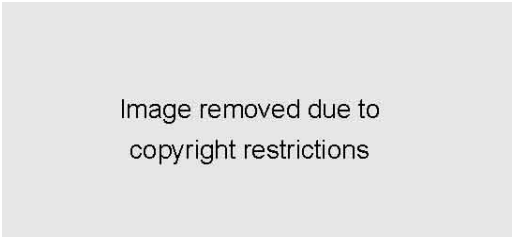


Image removed due to
copyright restrictions

Fig.57. See Fig. 56.

(source from Zhan, Wang, *The New Suyuan Stone Catalogue* (New York: Charta Books Ltd, 2011), p. 85.)

2.7 Chinese Artist - Chen Shaoxiong, 陳劭雄

Chen Shaoxiong, (b.1962) graduated from the Guangzhou Fine Art Academy in 1984. He now works and lives in Beijing and is considered to be one of the most important artists in the contemporary Chinese art scene. The artist's conceptual work employs a variety of media, including photography, video, installation and ink painting, to investigate the dynamics of China's cityscapes. Thematically, his work often deals with the rapid urbanisation and constantly changing environments of his home province in

southern China. Chen Shaoxiong is fascinated by urban change and he focuses his artistic endeavours by recording street life with a fast-reacting compact camera to record all kinds of people, objects and signs. He states that his response to his home city of Guangzhou is more like that of a tourist who constantly discovers new faces and new things at every moment.³⁵ He is deeply attracted by the ephemeral surprises caused by the incessant changes of the cityscape and its people.

Chen first uses his camera to shoot the streetscape from his window, to record things that are happening in his view, as one might view a scene through a window. The whole process is derived from the concept of 'Framing' which is a principle of traditional western painting.³⁶ Framing makes the main object most noticeable in the picture while other things that appear to be out of focus are less important. He then invents a method called: photo-collage by photographing the street scenes.³⁷ After that, he cuts out the figures of the objects like people, street signs, vehicles, trash bins etc according to the proportions of their size, in order to make them into solid cards which are then transformed into three dimensional cardboard cutouts to reconstruct the street views. This photo-narrative is a miniature streetscape, representative of real life situations and represented in a series of boxes, which act as a 'frame' to guide the viewer to experience his own created cityscapes. This photo narration is his understanding of reproducing real life. This can extend the space of a picture infinitely.(Fig. 58 and 59)

35. Chen Shaoxiong, *Why I take street photos of Guangzhou*,1999.

36. Ibid.

37. Hou Hanru, Chen Shaoxiong, *From Portable Streets to Private Diplomacy*, 2009.




Image removed due to
copyright restrictions

Fig.58. Chen Shaoxiong, *Streetscape*, 2005,
cut out photos on cardboard, artist's collection.
(source from
<http://www.chenshaoxiong.net/?p=1100>)




Image removed due to
copyright restrictions

Fig.59. Chen Shaoxiong, *Streetscape*, 2005,
cut out photos on cardboard, artist's collection.
(source from
<http://www.chenshaoxiong.net/?p=1100>)

Chen then creates another series of artworks that combine various images collected from different cities and arranged in several layers to form a three-dimensional photo collage of a street view. He then travels with this portable box and takes photographic records of the set up in different cities around the world including Guangzhou, Shanghai, Berlin and, Paris. This portable cities series reflects the nomadic life and the transient nature of the city in the 21st Century and is also a review of unfolding city events within the context of a contemporary urban space. (Fig. 60, 61 and 62)




Image removed due to
copyright restrictions

Fig.60. Chen Shaoxiong, *Street, Opera, Paris*, 2004, cut out photos on cardboard, artist's collection.



Image removed due to
copyright restrictions

Fig.61. Chen Shaoxiong, *Street, Zurich*, 2005, cut out photos on cardboard, artist's collection.
(source from
<http://www.chenshaoxiong.net/?p=768>)




Image removed due to
copyright restrictions

Fig.62. Chen Shaoxiong, *Street, Brussels*, 2001, cut out photos on cardboard, artist's collection.
(source from
<http://www.chenshaoxiong.net/?p=783>)

To Chen, capturing scenery through a window-like structure is a visual journey, similar to that of a tourist travelling to yet another city, constantly discovering new faces and

new things at every turn. His photos freeze the nature of the crowd, the dominance of the image and the public or collective memory, resetting these images with the cityscape surroundings as a background. Through this process, he retains his memory of the city and thus creates a scenic record of this constantly changing metropolis.

Chen's work is different from many other artists who are overwhelmed by hundreds of booming skyscrapers that appear to symbolize the success of economic prosperity. Chen is more attracted by the "lower level of people's life styles" on the street level. He understands that urbanization is not only signified by the construction of skyscrapers. More importantly, it involves a process of social transformation in order to generate a truly urban and civil society – the rise of a new urbanized citizen class involving immigration from rural areas and the introduction of a consumer society. The street is the most immediate and ideal location to encounter and grasp such a new mode of visual communication and corresponding cultural values in this new social, economic and political system.

2.8 Oversea Artist - Slinkachu

Slinkachu (b. 1979) began working as a street artist in 2006 after he moved from Devon to London in 2002, from where he pursued a career in commercial art and design. His work involves the creation of small-scale street art installations through the remodeling and painting of miniature models (train set figures brought from model shops), which he then places, photographs, and leaves on the streets of the bustling city. His work is both a street art installation project and a photography project.

Slinkachu aims to make people more aware of their surroundings as they travel around the city. He arranges scenes with the miniature model figures in different locations in the city and makes them more evident through photographic documentation and his working titles. (Fig. 63) He expresses a new sense of being in the city, unleashing our imagination and provoking us to look at the city afresh. Through the vertiginous shifts of perspective, he rediscovers everyday situations and objects and sensations. A pool of water at the roadside becomes a flooding accident in his work. (Fig. 64); the metal leg of an outdoor seat becomes a place for hanging up drying clothes. (Fig. 65) These figures embody the melancholy and loneliness of living in a big city, and incite a renewed perspective of the everyday urban experience to those who find them.

Slinkachu has a skillful technique in his articulation of scale. In our daily lives we seldom recognize the fact that there is life in varying scales around us. His work provokes us to contemplate the city from both micro and macro perspectives.

Slinkachu often remodels the miniature figures, cutting them up, adding new features with modeling clay, or changing arm and leg positions. He then paints them with acrylic paint and finds props for them. Some undergo considerable modification in order to narrate a story with the city environment as a contextual backdrop. (Fig. 66)

Slinkachu has created Street Art installations in cities all over the world, including Berlin, Lisbon, Amsterdam, Barcelona, and Manchester.

Image removed due to
copyright restrictions

Fig. 63. Slinkachu, *They're not pets, Susan*, 2007, artist's collection.
(source from <http://slinkachu.com/little-people>.)

Image removed due to
copyright restrictions

Fig. 64. Slinkachu, *After the storm*, 2008, artist's collection.
(source from <http://slinkachu.com/little-people>.)

Image removed due to
copyright restrictions

Fig.65. Slinkachu, *Hung up*, 2007, artist's collection.
(source from <http://slinkachu.com/little-people>.)

Image removed due to
copyright restrictions

Fig.66. Slinkachu, *Office politics*, 2006, artist's collection.
(source from <http://slinkachu.com/little-people>.)

2.9 Summary

All of these artists are inspired by the development of cities and their works have reflected their perception toward the cities they are living in. Their artworks are either inspired by the disappearance of the old communities as can be seen in the work of Zhang Wang and Chen Shaoxiong, the conflict between city development and nature in the work of Danny Lee or the city's inherent social problems and living conditions in the work of Kacey Wong. This provides a number of different perspectives to explore the city and has been helpful in the development of my own artworks. In addition, the variety of the art forms used, such as photography, sculpture, installation and performance by these artists in order to represent their unique interpretation of the city has inspired me as to the possibilities of the mode of presentation of my own work and this is further enhanced by the wide ranging variety of media such as stainless steel, mirrors, recycled wood and daily utensils.

Chapter 3 Hong Kong and Beijing

In this chapter, I will discuss the development of the cities of both Hong Kong and Beijing. Whilst Hong Kong is my primary place of residence, I have worked and lived in both cities since establishing my architectural office in Beijing in 1999. Since then, I have travelled between Hong Kong and Beijing frequently and have witnessed the rapid development in Beijing over the past decade. The changing appearance of the cityscape, cultural perspectives, the respective similarity of the economic boom and the rapidly changing dynamic of these two cities has had a major impact on the development of my artwork.

The historical development of both cities is outlined below.

3.1 History of Hong Kong

Hong Kong, literally means 'Fragrant Harbour', and derives its name from the transportation of incense made from the Heung tree, which is native to Southern China. It was planted in large quantities in the Dongguan district of Guangdong province and Hong Kong a few hundred years ago. Whilst Hong Kong's rapid development into a major modern metropolis has occurred over the last one hundred years, it has a legendary historical background, which dates back two thousand years.

The first links between Hong Kong inhabitant's and mainland China can be dated back to the third century BC according to archaeological findings. However, the initial major

influx of Chinese occurred in the twelfth century when the first of the great family clans of China moved into the region now called the New Territories. Later in the eighteenth century, there was another influx of people into the city. This time they were the Hakka, members of a tribe from North East China. The outbreak of the first Anglo-Chinese War (1839-42) was a result of commercial disputes between the Chinese Qing government and the British; Hong Kong was then ceded to the British under the Treaty of Nanjing (1842) and was opened up as a port for foreign trading. At that time, Hong Kong had a small population composed mainly of fishing people and the island was largely mountainous and marshy. To the British, Hong Kong offered a good harbor and the prospect of a successful centre for commerce. Later, in 1860, the Kowloon Peninsula was further ceded to the British in the second Anglo-Chinese War and in 1898, the New Territories and the outlying 200 islands were leased to the British on a 99-year lease. The population of Hong Kong grew rapidly during this period; public transport developed; gas and electricity supplies improved due to the effects of commerce. Many buildings were then constructed in the Central district, thus becoming the formative embryo of a modern city. (Fig. 67, 68, 69, 70, 71 and 72)




Image removed
due to copyright
restrictions

Fig.67. Monsignor Simeone Volonteri, *Map of Hong Kong*, 1686, colored lithograph, 92 x 114 cm, collection of Hong Kong Museum of Art History.
(source from *History Through Maps-An Exhibiton of Old Maps of China* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Museum of History, 1997).)

Image removed
due to copyright
restrictions

Fig.68. Artist unknown, *Waterfront, Central, Hong Kong*, 1870, printed photo, collection of Hong Kong Museum of History.

(source from *Historical Photographs of Hona Kona Part 1* (Hona Kona: Hona

Image removed
due to copyright
restrictions

Fig.69. Artist unknown, *Waterfront, Central, Hong Kong*, 1880, printed photo, collection of Hong Kong Museum of History P68.148.

(source from *Historical Photographs of Hong Kong Part 3* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Museum of History, 1997).)

Image removed
due to copyright
restrictions

Fig.71. Osbert Chadwick, *Plan of the City of Victoria*, 1882, colored lithograph, 32 x 90 cm, collection of Hong Kong Museum of History.

(source from *History Through Maps-An Exhibiton of Old Maps of China* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Museum of History, 1997).)




Image removed due to
copyright restrictions

Fig.72. Artist unknown, *Queens Road, Central District, Hong Kong*, 1950, printed photo, collection of Hong Kong Museum of History P71.59.

(source from *Historical Photographs of Hong Kong Part 3* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Museum of History, 1997).)

The unstable political conditions in mainland China during the 20th Century had a great impact on the development of Hong Kong, resulting in waves of refugees from mainland China fleeing to Hong Kong over several decades. This began with the 1911 Revolution and was followed by the Civil War between the Communists and the Nationalists; the Japanese invasion of China in 1937 and the Communist government's 'Great Leap Forward' movement (1958-1961). During these events millions of people entered Hong Kong, providing cheap labour and momentum for the development of business and economic growth. Foreign and local businesses in Hong Kong started manufacturing industries and financial services, making Hong Kong one of the world's most prosperous cities. Hong Kong experienced rapid economic growth after the notorious riots in 1967.³⁸ With the "opening up" of China to the world in the

38. The first riot was due to the rising fares of the Star Ferry in 1966. A petition was created to protest against the increases in transportation costs. The riots in 1967 began when internal conflict within the Communist party in China resulted in the Cultural Revolution. Pro-communist leftists in Hong Kong challenged British rule. Demonstrations were held and rumours spread that China was preparing to take over the colony. The riot ended in December 1967 when the leftist group in Hong Kong was ordered to stop. The economy soared after the riots with the growth of manufacturing production and real estate development.

early 1980s, Hong Kong became the major port for all foreign trade with China. Economic boom in trade and the property markets made Hong Kong a vibrant and prosperous city. From the 1970s, skyscrapers began to emerge in Hong Kong. Satellite cities like Shatin and Tsuen Wan, with high-rise commercial and residential buildings were developed in the New Territories. Each of these new towns/cities has a population as great as many Western cities.

On July 1st, 1997, Hong Kong ended its colonial history and returned to its motherland, the People's Republic of China. With the end of British colonial rule, Hong Kong became what is known as a "Special Administrative Region" of China allowing it to retain its own existing social, legal and economic systems for the following 50 years, under the 'One country, two systems' structure. This change further enhanced the role of Hong Kong as a gateway between the outside world and mainland China. Internationally, Hong Kong is not only a financial and commercial hub, but it has also become a global tourist attraction with remarkable expansion in the arts and cultural events.

3.2 City Planning of Hong Kong

Modern Hong Kong was planned from the very beginning, unlike many cities, which developed gradually. This is because the city occupies a fraction of its actual land area, retaining most of the remaining land for rural purposes. High-density buildings are packed like needles in the downtown area. The limited downtown areas of Hong Kong Island only allowed for a restricted centralized expansion. Therefore supplementary areas away from the downtown environment were developed in the 1970's. Multiple, satellite cities are connected by networks of communication and transport infrastructure. Many people criticize this form of hybridization. Some say, it has resulted in a disorganised and chaotic, urban city phenomena, with a hyper-dense skyscraper jungle located at the bottom of the mountains. Most of the buildings are uniform in type and appearance without any outstanding character or identity.³⁹ Old buildings and monuments have been systematically demolished at an alarming rate and more reclamation of land from Victoria Harbour is being planned. It is an instant urban-scape with an instant, short-lived form of architecture.

39. Gutierrez, Laurent, Valerie Portefaix, *Mapping HK*, Hong Kong, Map book, 2000:11.

3.3 History and City Planning of Beijing

Image removed
due to copyright
restrictions

Fig.73. Artist unknown, *A Qing Map of Beijing*, woodcut hanging scroll, 108.5 x 63.5 cm, collection of National Library of China.
(source from *History Through Maps-An Exhibiton of Old Maps of China* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Museum of History, 1997).)

Beijing is both a political and cultural centre, with the earliest traces of human habitation dating back some 250,000 years. It has been the capital of China since the 15th Century and the city has essentially retained its current shape from this period. (Fig. 73) Beijing's construction is based on the concept of an "Ideal City" where the Imperial Palace is located at the centre and surrounded by quarters of residential areas. The whole city was planned like a chessboard with linear streets running east to west and south to north. The city was originally divided into an inner and outer city by a city wall, which was pulled down after the Communists seized the city in 1949. The city then

expanded beyond the old walled city and its surrounding neighborhoods, with industries in the west and residential neighborhoods in the north. Much of Beijing's old area was torn down in the 1960s to make way for the construction of the Beijing Subway. Beijing has expanded rapidly in the past few decades with the subsequent addition of the 3rd, 4th, 5th, 6th and 7th Ring Roads. In 2005, the size of the newly developed Beijing was one and a half times larger than that of the old Beijing within the 2nd Ring Road. The vast expansion of Beijing has brought problems of urbanization and the loss of historic neighborhoods. The city has changed its appearance rapidly in the past three decades. Modern architecture and curtain wall skyscrapers appear at

every corner of the city.

3.4 Generic City, Particular City

In Rem Koolhaas's book *Small, Medium, Large, Extra-Large*, which critically comments on contemporary city development, he introduces and formulates the birth of the 'generic city'. Koolhaas describes a real urban phenomenon, especially in Asia, of developing an inevitable trend towards 'verticality'. 'The skyscraper looks as if it becomes the final, definitive typology.'⁴⁰ He also points out the three main characteristics of a generic city - airports, hotels and shopping malls. Both Hong Kong and Beijing developed new airports to cater for the expansion of tourism, business and commerce in 1997 and 2008 respectively. Both airports are designed by the famous architect Norman Foster and have come to signify the image of the city itself. In addition, hotels and shopping malls have become a stereotype in every district of both cities. Are Hong Kong and Beijing simply generic cities without any particular substance?

40. Koolhaas, Rem and Mau Bruce, *Small, Medium, Large, Extra-Large*, New York, Monacelli Press Inc. 1995: 1250-1253, 1260-1262.

What makes Hong Kong so special? Is it that Hong Kong's dynamism is expressed in a variety of ways and manifested by a collective energy and vitality? Is it because Hong Kong has trod a very special political/historical path-from a rural Chinese fishing village to a British colony and then in turn to a Special Administrative Region of the Peoples Republic of China?

What makes Beijing unique? Is it the existence of the largest imperial architectural complex, which defines its historical significance or is it the political and cultural heritage, inherited by the old Beijing citizens that reveals the intrinsic traditional values?

It challenges our perceptions to understand what the essence of a city is. Grasping the surface of things by adopting the superficial descriptions of Hong Kong or Beijing is the common practice in tourist guidebooks. In order to understand the city from a different perspective and to gain a greater personal appreciation and understanding of it, I regularly wander through the city to gain a firsthand sense of inspiration for the development of my artwork. It is my belief that both Hong Kong and Beijing's spatial complexity cannot be directly reproduced and can only be perceived through intuitive understanding.

Chapter 4 Personal Studio Research

The detailed research of the general city development in Chapter 1 and the research study of Hong Kong and Beijing in Chapter 3 established a solid foundation for my studio research. In this chapter, I will describe the development of my artwork in a spatial context and how it reflects my perception towards Hong Kong and Beijing. I will first provide a brief personal history followed by my impression of the two cities and will then proceed to showcase the development of my artworks as a dialogue with the cityscape.

4.1 Background and Introduction

I remember when I was in kindergarten my favourite game was playing with toy blocks to set up houses and build mini cityscapes. I enjoyed building with different blocks to make new 'scenes' and repeated this for hours. From the age of around five or six years old, I liked to go out and wander around my neighbourhood and observe my surroundings. I had neither a fixed destination nor direction, but simply experienced the process and the sensation. I was always fascinated by the cityscape and the environment around me, which led me in later years to study architecture at the University of Hong Kong (1984-1990). After graduation, I subsequently set up my architectural office in Hong Kong, Beijing and later in Shanghai. I moved to Beijing in 1999 and travelled frequently between Hong Kong, Beijing and various other cities. The contrast, similarities and differences of these cities triggered an interest, which led me to review Hong Kong from other perspectives and cultural angles. The city appearance, historical background and cultural heritage of Hong Kong and Beijing are

totally different. However, both cities encountered an economic boom in both the 1980's and 2000's and the rapid process of modernisation of both cities along with the disappearance of old neighbourhoods was virtually identical. As an architect, I was inevitably involved in this process and acted as a participant during the changing process of the cityscapes of both cities.

After having practiced architecture for around 20 years since graduation, I wanted to adopt an artist's identity to explore another relationship between art and the city. I adopted the following strategies to facilitate this process.

1. Explore the surrounding environment and the representational means regarding the city. This involves specific research, which reflects upon the identity of the city.
2. Investigate the possible art forms generated from the inspiration gained from the cityscape.
3. Study the inherent messages embodied in the artwork.

4.2 City Impression and Representation

4.2.1 Photos of the Surrounding Environment

The city is an inspiring source of artistic creative potential and wandering around the city is my initial step to experience Hong Kong and Beijing. The movement within the city is directed by the existing infrastructure and network system. Walking through the physical city, I continually experience human interaction; spatial articulation and can participate in the events of the time. I wander around the area near my office, studio and apartment and also occasionally to places that I have not been to before.

Photographs are taken during these walks to record and document whatever takes my interest. These city spaces, such as the back lanes; abandoned land; the highways; tunnels; the flyovers...proliferate near every corner of our city, and yet their presence is often neglected and overlooked. (Fig 74, 75, 76 and 77) Sometimes, I take photographs with an aim to consciously capture a particular image or at other times I might take random images with no particular intent.

After taking the photos, I usually review them in 2 ways. Initially, I view the photos individually. This process is similar to looking at a painting. Then I collage several photos together into a series of images similar to that of viewing a short movie. In the first method, the photos create a visual frame to define the boundary for viewing, offering a more confined perspective. The second viewing process involves the association of different networks of events, people, matter and activities.

All of the photos are archived and provide visual options for the future studio development of the artworks.



Fig.74. City Photo, Hong Kong.
(source from Ng, E. and Chan T.Y. *A Simple Method of Daylighting* (Hong Kong: Department of Architecture, Chinese University of Hong Kong, 2002), p. 3.)

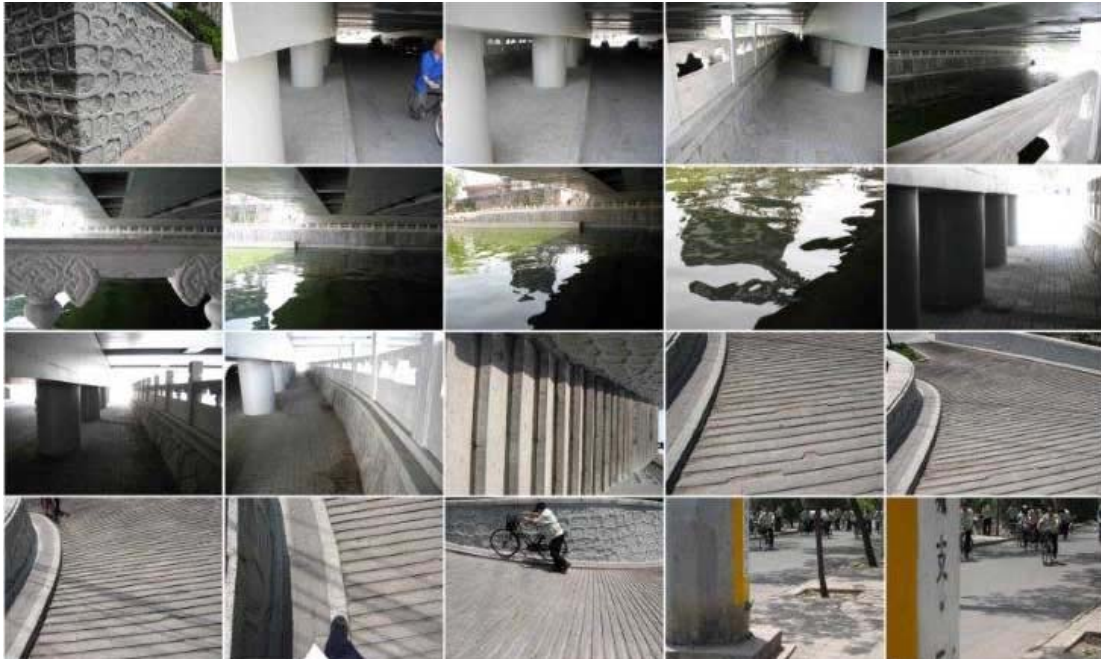


Fig.75. City Photo, Beijing.



Fig.76. City Photo, Beijing.



Fig.77. City Photo, Beijing.

4.2.2 Photos of Skyscrapers

When I studied for my Masters degree in Environmental and Sustainable design at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, I was required to study the amount of daylight in

Image removed
due to copyright
restrictions

different places in Hong Kong. The process evaluated the degree of daylight by counting the number of dots on a fish eye view of the photos. The more spots that were present on the photo represented more daylight. (Fig. 78) I went on to take some city spot photos with a camera with a fish eye lens in a similar manner to those taken by Warren Leung when he was in New York. However, my process at that time followed a more scientific methodology to collect the findings and to carry out experiments to compare and analyse the collected data. I then considered

Fig.78. Study of Daylighting.
(source from Ng, E. and Chan T.Y. *A Simple Method of Daylighting* (Hong Kong: Department of Architecture, Chinese University of Hong Kong, 2002), p. 3.)

Image removed
due to copyright
restrictions

Fig.79. Skyscraper in Hong Kong.
(source from
http://www.epd.gov.hk/eia/register/report/eiareport/eia_1532008/EIA-pdf/Appendix/app%206.1.pdf)

strategies that might link architecture and art together, which led me to re-take these photographs with a more intuitive approach. I went to the central business districts in Hong Kong and Beijing, which are both tightly packed with skyscrapers. I ignored the architectural form and its associated language, instead focusing totally on the pure geometrical composition. The

sky (negative domain) framed by the skyscraper (positive counterparts) forms a peculiar and unique form and silhouette with both a solid and void effect. (Fig. 79 and 80) The photos were reviewed one by one to observe the peculiar forms. Each photo



Fig.80. Skyscraper in Beijing.

depicted its own individual sense of character. After this shooting process, I then grouped all of the photos together to form a collective sense of energy. This resulted in a totally new picture with solid/void, positive/negative, and shadow/ light; reminiscent of the two polar forces in Taoism.⁴¹ This represents a shift from a concept of scientific cognition to a more ambiguous artistic domain and a shift from three-dimensional architecture to a two-dimensional graphic representation in a number of the compositions.

(Fig. 81)

41. Taoism is one of the oldest schools of thought in China which emphasizes living in harmony with the Tao (way). Tao generates the nature which is composed of Ying and Yang. Ying and Yang are not opposing forces but complement each other.

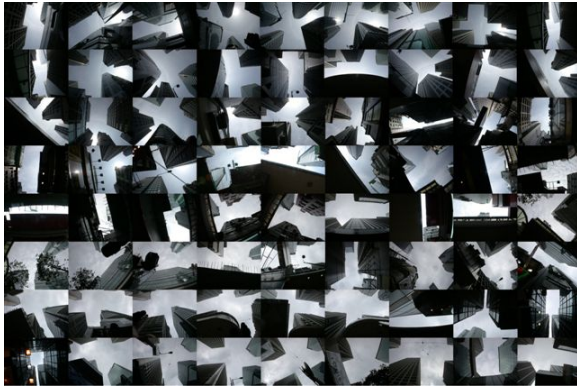


Fig.81. Skyscraper. Photographic composition.

4.2.3 Photos of Waterfronts



Fig.82. Map of The Central, Hong Kong showing the original coastal line till 1979. Source from Zhang Zaiyuan and Liu Shaoyu, *A City Image of Central Hong Kong*, 1997. (source from http://www.epd.gov.hk/eia/register/report/eiareport/eia_1532008/EIA-pdf/Appendix/app%206.1.pdf)

Hong Kong is a city of continuous land reclamation, which has played a significant role in its urban development. Over 10% of Hong Kong's developed land has been reclaimed from the sea.⁴² The history of reclamation dates back to the 1850's when sections of the present Queen's Road Central and Sheung Wan district were reclaimed under the instruction of Governor George Bonham. The coastline of Hong Kong has been constantly changing due

to reclamation projects over the past century. (Fig. 82)

The waterfront is within an arm's reach of where I live and work in Hong Kong. This

42. See JJ Jiao, *Preliminary study on impact of land reclamation on regional groundwater regime*, 2002.

waterfront, close to my office, has only been formed in the past 20 years. The historical development of the waterfront aroused my interest and I was keen to locate the original



Fig.83. Map of Wanchai, Hong Kong showing the original coastal line till 1982. Source from Wanchai District Board, 1992. (source from http://www.epd.gov.hk/eia/register/report/eiareport/eia_1532008/EIA-pdf/Appendix/app%206.1.pdf)

coastline in different eras. I discovered the area north of Queen's Road East is reclaimed land.

My previous studio in Wanchai, at Sik On street, is located near what was the seashore approximately one hundred years ago and the

location of my present office in Lockhart Road was actually part of Victoria Harbour. (Fig. 83)

All of these findings have had a significant impact on my perception of this city.

In contrast to Hong Kong, which is an island, Beijing, in geographical terms, is a continental city of flat land surrounded by mountains to the North. Two rivers run through the city and some lakes (North Sea, Back Sea...) are located at the western side of the city. These lakes are called 'seas' because Beijing people like to live next to the sea, which alleviates the dry weather conditions. My Beijing office is located at Andingmen where there is also a promenade within one minute's walk. I later learnt that the location of this promenade is where the original old Beijing city wall stood. It had been demolished in the 1950s and this promenade is connected to the Summer Palace. In the Qing Dynasty, the Emperor usually preferred to travel by boat rather than

carriage during a vacation to the Summer Palace. This has given me a completely different perception of this promenade when I wander there now.



Fig.84. Segment of coastal line of Hong Kong.

I then sketched out the coastline of Hong Kong and the outline of the several lakes in Beijing into a number of individual segments and juxtaposed

them on paper. These segments carry no functional meaning towards the image or

definition of Hong Kong and Beijing. However, these lines and patterns are significant for they represent to me the collective memory inherited within the city itself. (Fig. 84)

4.2.4 Map

After walking through the three dimensional spaces within a city, I began to determine if I could review it again from another perspective. The city, as an infrastructure, constructed by a series of positive objects (building blocks) and negative spaces (roads and streets), can be abstracted and represented in a two-dimensional graphic context with signs and information as represented on a map. The code/symbol is conveyed in a specified way via an act of rational systems and analysis. A map is a tool in the cognitive world used to represent the city surroundings, streets and land and also to provide a sense of orientation. Ernst Cassirer (1874-1945) pointed out that primitive man cannot read maps as they cannot transform their surroundings into a two-dimensional representation.⁴³ This led me to consider that even if a city is printed on a

43. Cassirer, Ernst, *An Essay on Man*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1944: 46.

map, not everyone can read the map by understanding specific locations or directions. A map seems to only work for certain people. Hence, I began to look at maps of Hong Kong and Beijing (Fig. 85) to find the areas I both knew and didn't know. I can make associations with a place by memory when I recognize the particular area on the map that I have visited. However, for an area that I have never visited, the map becomes simply a graphic image to me. I then neglected the words and messages directly or partly associated with the map, such as the names/ orientation/ direction, choosing instead to focus on the form, shape, lines and the peculiar compositions that could be found in the map. The negative spaces occupied by roads and streets are extracted as the counterpart of the buildings to form an abstracted pattern. (Fig. 86) This provided a source of inspiration and a totally new perspective towards the cognitive domain and I extracted the pattern and re-assembled it in an intuitive way. (Fig. 87, 88 and 89) As such, this is a process of de-characterization of the city's symbols/signs in order to generate another particular image for the city which subsequently became a catalyst for the further development of my artwork.

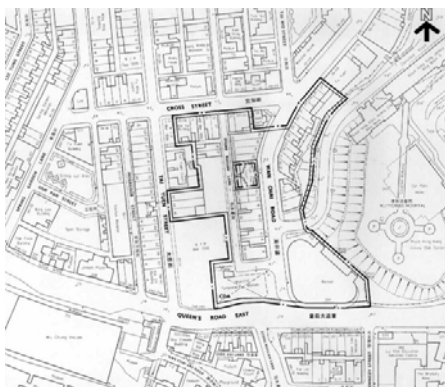


Fig.85. Hong Kong Map.

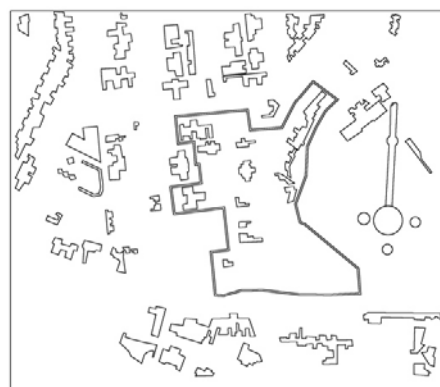


Fig.86. Void pattern of Hong Kong Map.



Fig.87. Composition of void pattern form Hong Kong map.

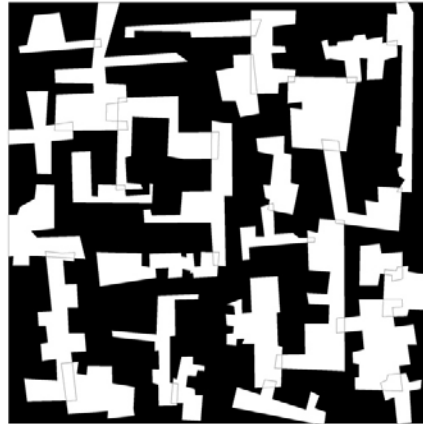


Fig.88. Composition of void pattern form Hong Kong map.

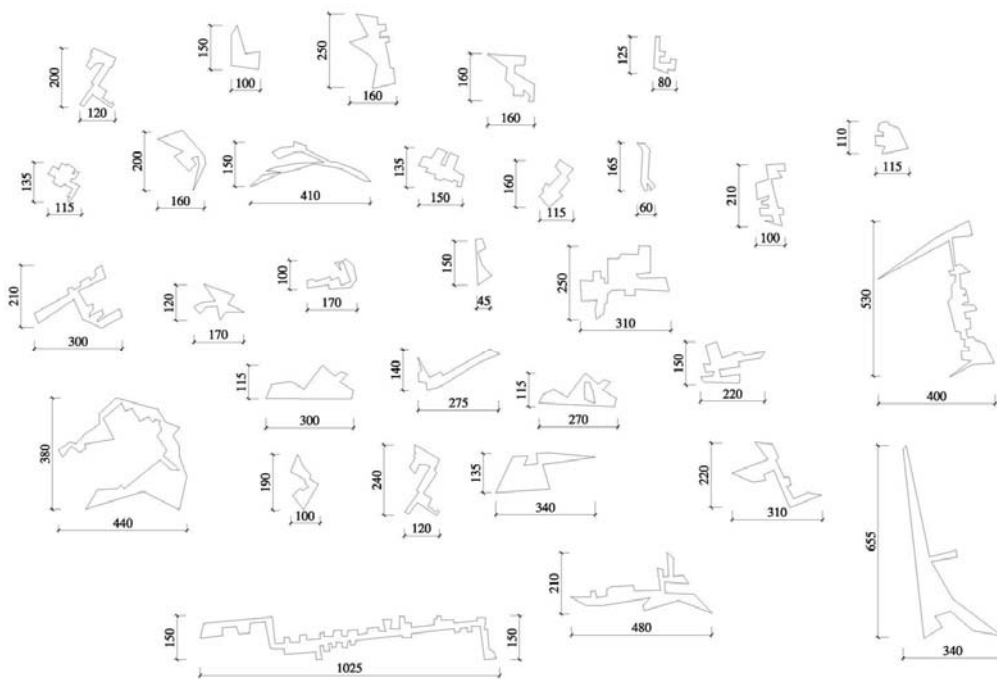


Fig.89. City Pattern.

4.3 Possible Art Forms

Following the initial visual research, I then explored two possible directions through which to further develop my artwork. I began with a direct interaction with the

cityscape by placing various figures in different city locations in order to create dialogue with the cityscape. The second direction aimed to transform the cityscape into alternative options as art forms to represent my personal perception of Hong Kong and Beijing. The experiments resulted in several installation works as shown below.

4.3.1 Interacting with the Cityscape

I explored corners of the city intuitively in both Hong Kong and Beijing, by visiting places that I knew well and other areas that I had never been to. I then viewed the surrounding environment, objects, organisms and happenings in a much more detailed way as compared to most people's everyday response to the city. This activity, is somewhat similar to that of a detective story, and is perhaps, more in keeping with the search for evidence in a crime. In a similar manner to Slinkachu's alternative view of the city, I aimed to be sensitive and responsive to different locations in the city. Figures are placed in the selected locations to explore the relationship between the figures and the surrounding environment in order to construct a narrative. For instance, the street gutter, with some imagination, can become a cliff for diving, (Fig. 90); a piece of grassland appears to become a garden of bushes that requires cutting, (Fig. 91); a fence in someone's neighbourhood transforms into a cultivated farmland. (Fig. 92) Playing with scale provides an alternative viewing possibility whereby a commonplace area can become a place of inspiration. All of these experiments aimed to discover the unique character of pockets of the city and aimed to deliver yet another possibility to their interpretation.



Fig.90. Arthur Chan, *Our City 1*, 2009, C print, each 20 x 30 cm, artist's collection.



Fig.91. Arthur Chan, *Our City 2*, 2009, C print, each 20 x 30 cm, artist's collection.



Fig.92. Arthur Chan, *Our City 3*, 2009, C print, each 20 x 30 cm, artist's collection.

This research was not limited to Hong Kong and Beijing; I have also explored different set-ups in other cities during my travels. During my stay in Ho Chi Minh City for the Doctoral Seminar program in 2009, I carried out various set-ups in the Ho Chi Minh City Fine Arts Museum in out of the way places to extend this option of storytelling. (Fig. 93) These works may not be relevant to the Hong Kong and Beijing cityscapes as they are set up outside of these two cities, however, this can be viewed in a global context where the inspiration from the perception of the cityscape in the development of artworks remains valid.

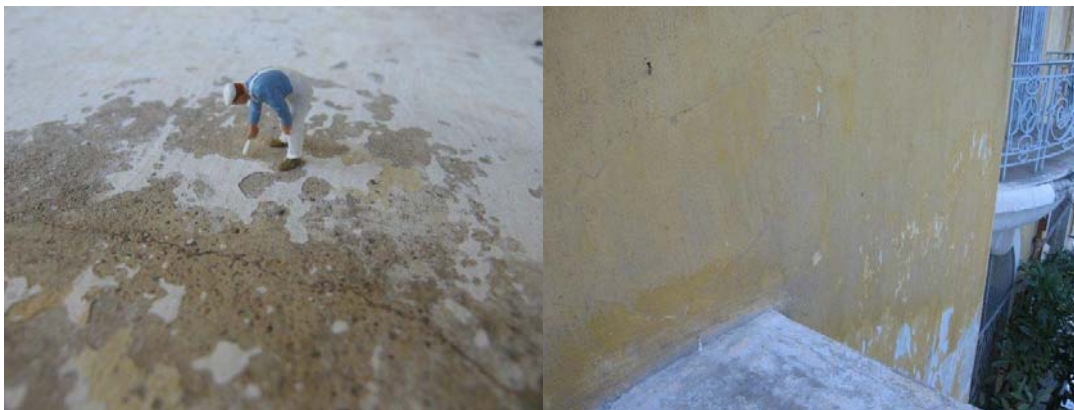


Fig.93. Arthur Chan, *Our City 15*, 2009, C print, each 20 x 30 cm, artist's collection.

I assembled the photographs together as a dyptych to form an artwork whereby viewers might establish a story /dialogue between the two images. During the interaction with the work, the viewer will search for events that may have happened before (memory) and try to construct their own story with different readings. This set up stimulates another possible sequence/relationship of seeing that involves both searching and revealing.⁴⁴

44. See the exhibition *If each time...* by John Berger and Jean Mohr in *Another Way of Telling*. The 150 photos are without any text and are placed to create an ambiguous linkage for the viewer to have their own reading.

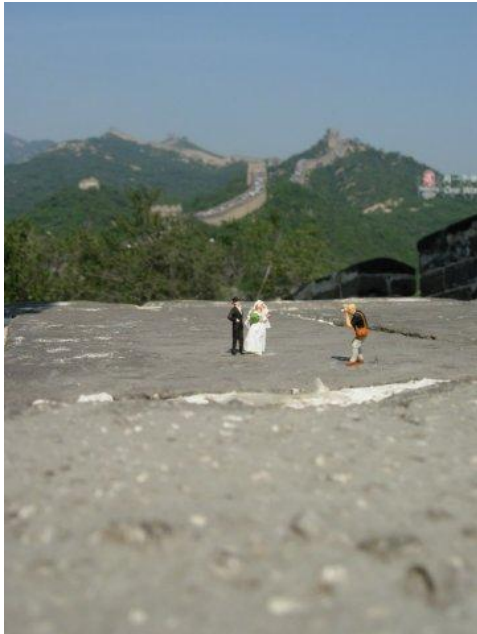


Fig.94. Arthur Chan, *Our City 16*, 2009, C print, 20 x 30 cm, artist's collection.

As well as exploring unknown city locations, I have also explored the relationship between the figures and very well known and famous locations, such as The Forbidden City, The Great Wall and The Olympic Stadium in Beijing. (Fig. 94 and 95) The photographs represent the figures shown with these city landmarks defined as the background. This set up succinctly echoes the same activities

engaged in by tourists when they visit these tourist areas. Landmarks, such as these, are considered



Fig.95. Arthur Chan, *Our City 17*, 2009, C print, each 20 x 30 cm, artist's collection.

by many people to be the core image of a city as reflected in my discussion in chapter 1, and become a tourist focus for taking photos. This series of artworks reveals this perceived view of the cityscape and invites the viewer to rethink whether a landmark is the best way to represent a city.

4.3.2 Transforming the Cityscape

The series of works with miniature figures presented some limitations in developing the artwork in terms of the spatial context. The pictorial presentation exists only in a two-dimensional format and this limits the viewer's way of seeing the artworks. It can only be viewed from one single perspective like that of a classical painting. In addition, the physical environment also limits the choice of location for the work. I therefore, shifted my focus from the physical interaction with the cityscape to a more self-constructed, abstract focus for the development of the artwork. The latter can provide a more flexible and wide-ranging choice of the selection of material, spatial composition and decisions about which areas of the city to locate the work. With the employment of the cityscape pattern in chapter 4.2, I constructed a series of artworks in a spatial context with inspiration from the perception of the city.

Only the negative components (streets, lanes, open spaces) are selected to form the city pattern in contrast to the normal perception of viewing the positive elements. From my perspective, most of the objects are defined by their negative counterparts, particularly in relation to the spatial context. In Chinese, "space", literally means the negative counterpart.⁴⁵ For instance, the negative space of a vase defines its physical form and it is the negative space that defines this object to be useful. With the same principle, a room can only be used as a room with the presence of its negative space.

45. Space, 空間, literally refers to void (空) and dividing (間) in Chinese; in between the dividing is actually a negative space. It is a tradition in Chinese to express negative space in the realm of aesthetics like Chinese Painting.

⁴⁶ Therefore, I explored the form of the artwork in relation to the play of the negative counterparts, which involves reflections and the employment of negative patterns of the city.

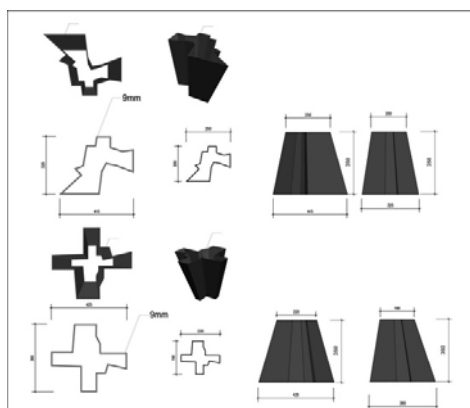


Fig.96. Arthur Chan, drawing of the artwork *Of Other Spaces 1* and *Of Other Spaces 2*, 2011, C print, 20 x 30 cm, artist's collection.

Reflection is the negative image of the physical cityscape that exists in the virtual world. This led me to explore the interaction between these positive and negative counterparts of the cityscape and juxtapose them to create a viable composition. I manifested the physical cityscape patterns into an apparatus with reflective qualities in order to reflect the surrounding images. Starting with simple geometrical forms and extending them with the

selected sky patterns in Hong Kong/Beijing (Fig. 96), I then transformed them into three-dimensional objects as illustrated in the artworks entitled '*Of Other Spaces*' (Fig.97) and '*The World 2*'. (Fig. 98) These artworks were placed in different locations and documentary photographs were taken to test the outcome. (Fig. 99) The angular surfaces provide a multi-layered reflection, which in turn generates an endless reflected image. (Fig. 95) The city surroundings, affected by these complex set of reflections, appear visually fragmented and creates a very peculiar composition. The city image

46. See Laozi, 老子, *Daode Jing*, 《道德經》 Chapter 11, The original Chinese reads 鑿戶牖以為室，當其無，有室之用。故有之以為利，無之以為用。

seems to have decomposed and reappeared in a fragmented form. (Fig. 100)



Fig.97. Arthur Chan, *Of Other Spaces 2*, 2011, Perspex, 35 x 32.5 x 41.5 cm, private collection.



Fig.98. Arthur Chan, *The World 2*, 2010, wood, paint, mirror, 30 x 10 x 20 cm, artist's collection.



Fig.99. The close-up photo of *The World 2*, 2010.
(Information of the artwork, see Fig. 94)

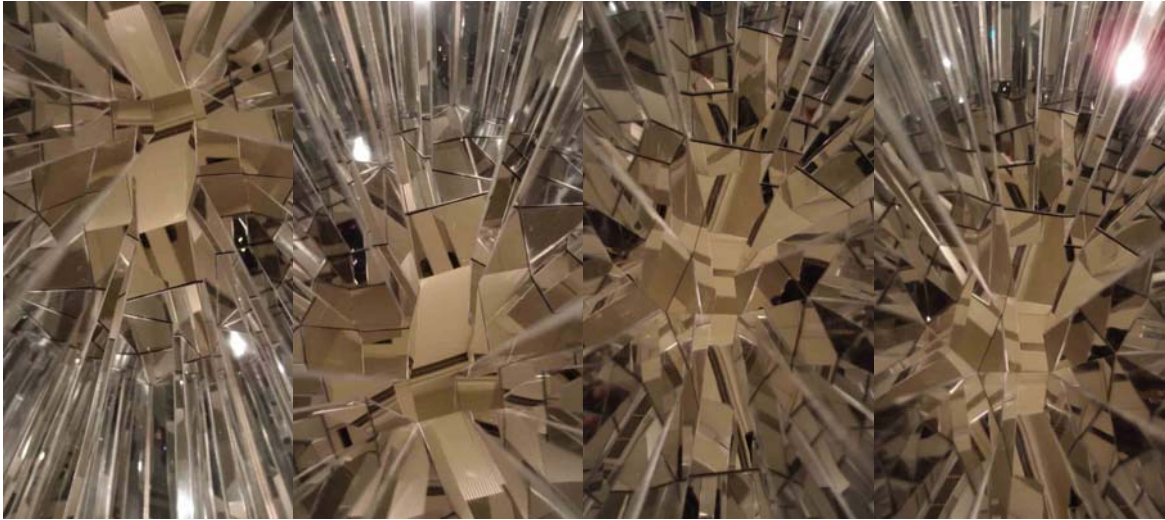


Fig.100. The close-up photos of *Of Other Spaces 2*, 2011. (Information of the artwork, see Fig. 93)

I further developed the artworks in a more abstract direction and detached mode from the physical cityscape; I applied the negative, abstract city patterns to represent the hidden characteristic of a city by not confining it to any specific city landmark. To me, these abstract patterns possess unique and inherited qualities, which can represent the city itself. As was the case a thousand years ago, our predecessors applied the principles of the geometry of the square and the circle in order to depict the image of The Ideal City. (Chapter 1) I then employed a technique involving multi-layering to accentuate the spatial composition where different city negative patterns are composed in 2-3 overlapping layers to give spatial depth. In the installation titled *About Improvisation 4* (Fig. 101) and *About Improvisation 4-1* (Fig. 102), around 15-20 segments of the negative patterns are juxtaposed to accentuate this multi-layering effect and enhance the aesthetic value of the spatial composition of the work. This multi-layering effect can be further expanded to 20 layers with lighter materials and smaller dimensions depending on where it is displayed. After sourcing light, mild steel



Fig.101. Arthur Chan, *About Improvisation 4*, 2009, galvanized mild steel, Perspex, 210 x 40 x 210 cm, private collection.



Fig.102. Arthur Chan, *About Improvisation 4-1*, 2010, wood, Perspex, 210x40 x 210 cm, artist collection.

wiring, I was able to display the waterfront pattern (Fig. 84) in 20 segments and juxtapose them in a sine pattern, resembling the memory of the up and down rhythm of a wave.



Fig.103. The close-up photo of *About Improvisation 4*, 2009. (Information of the artwork see Fig. 93)

This multi-layered effect is not limited to the artwork itself, but extends to the background wall, which provides yet another layer. Smaller scale negative city patterns made of perspex were fixed onto the wall to form the final component and to complement the artwork located in front of it. (Fig. 103)

The contrast of positive and negative characteristics are further intensified by the employment of controlled lighting to create shadows as can be seen in the installation work entitled *About Improvisation 4* (Fig. 101) and *About Improvisation 4-1* (Fig. 102). The artworks contrasts with the shadows cast onto the wall to form another layer of spatial interaction. The whole composition depicts a harmonious balance between the positive and negative; solid and void; dispersion and gathering. This effect is further enhanced when the number of layers is increased. The shadows merge with the sculpture so as to be seen as a whole while at the same time, the shadows can be viewed independently. The artwork entitled *The Peripheral Space* (Fig. 104) and *The Edging Space* (Fig. 105) best illustrates this quality. The shadows seamlessly fuse with the installation to form a sense of unity.

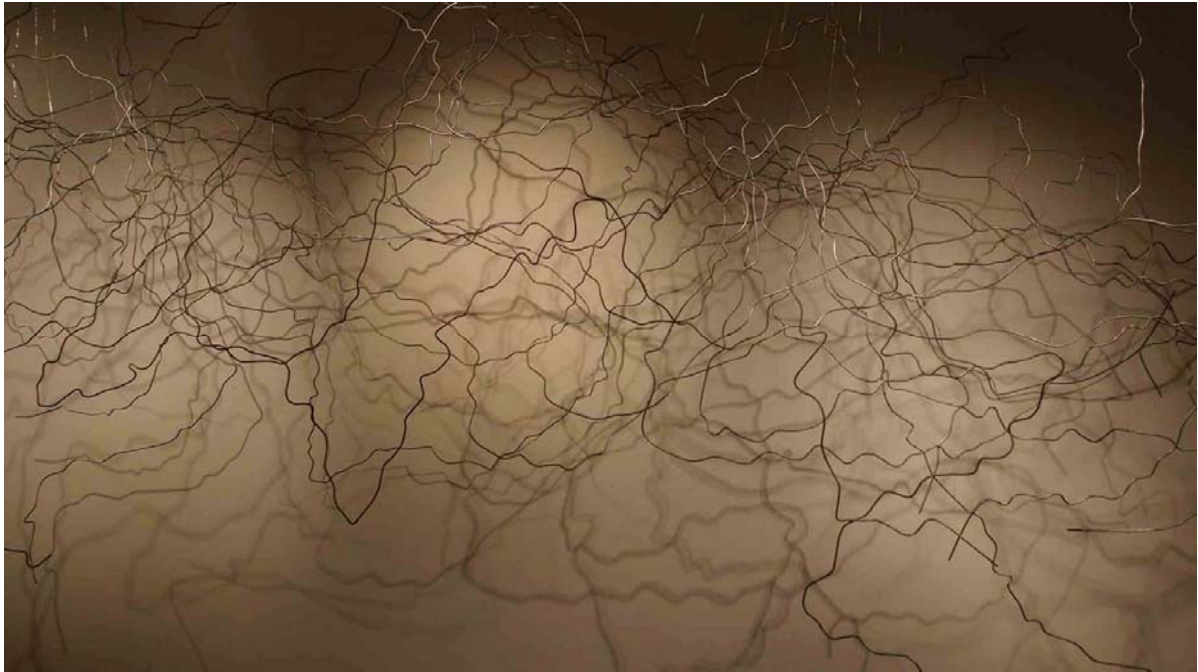


Fig.104. Arthur Chan, *The Peripheral Space*, 2011, galvanized mild steel wiring, 150 x 250 x 40 cm, artist's collection.



Fig.105. Arthur Chan, *The Edging Space*, 2011, galvanized mild steel wiring, 120 x 250 x 40 cm, artist's collection.

Apart from a single sculpture defined within the context of an installation set, the spatial qualities of the composition are further explored by combining multiple sculptures to enhance and extend the diverse compositional effects. For instance, the artworks entitled '*About Improvisation 5*' (Fig. 106), a commissioned artwork by Wharf (Holdings) Ltd and '*About Improvisation 6*' (Fig. 107), demonstrates how two independent sculptures can interplay with each other to form a whole. The two sculptures contrast with each other in terms of height, size and position and as such create a sense of visual diversity.



Fig.106. Arthur Chan, *About Improvisation 5*, 2011, galvanized mid steel, marble, Perspex, 230 x 500 x 80 cm, private collection.



Fig.107. Arthur Chan, *About Improvisation 6*, 2011, galvanized mid steel, wood, Perspex, 200 x 300 x 100 cm, artist's collection.

The abstract patterns stimulate the viewers to remove themselves from their physical world and transcend into a more spiritual realm. To me, these abstract patterns are not simply a form of emotional expression. They also represent a rational and objective presentation, as rational thinking is required to review an issue from a distance, in

order to form a concise and accurate picture with a clear mind.⁴⁷ The presentation of



Fig.108. Arthur Chan, *Of Other Spaces 3*, 2011, Perspex, 35 x 38 x 42.5cm, private collection.

the artwork is further transformed by removing it from a plinth (Fig. 108), to free standing on the floor (Fig. 109) and subsequently, to its most detached form, by hanging it from the ceiling (Fig. 110). In the artwork entitled *The Peripheral Space* (Fig. 111) and *The Edging Space* (Fig. 112), the artworks are suspended from the ceiling by transparent fishing wire in order to create a feeling of detachment and isolation.

47. The word Abstract originates from the Latin word - Abstractus which has the meaning of detachment.



Fig.109. Close-up photo of *About Improvisation 5*, 2011. (for information on the artwork see Fig. 102)

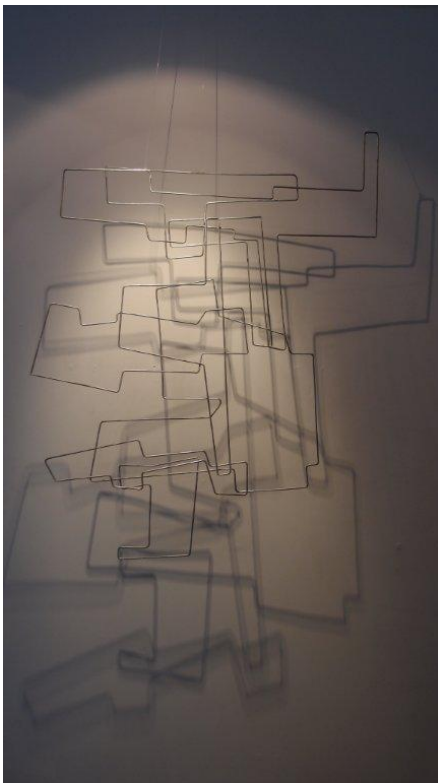


Fig.110. Arthur Chan, *The Edging Space 2*, 2011, galvanized mild steel wiring, 100 x 80 x 60 cm, artist's collection.

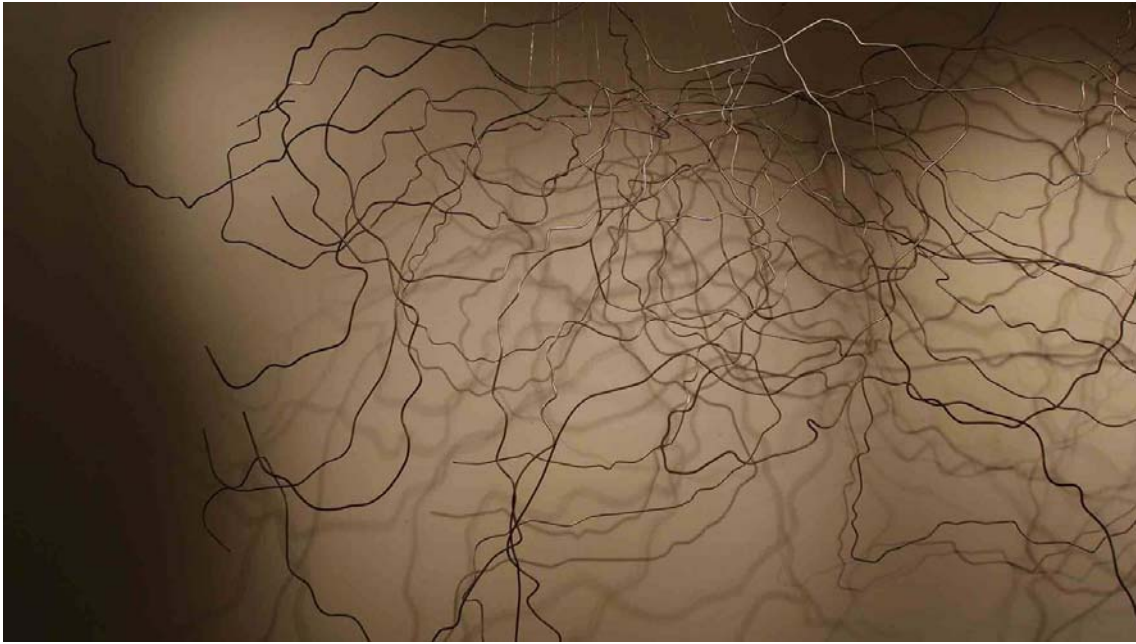


Fig.111. Close-up photo of *The Peripheral Space*, 2011. (for information on the artwork, see Fig.100)

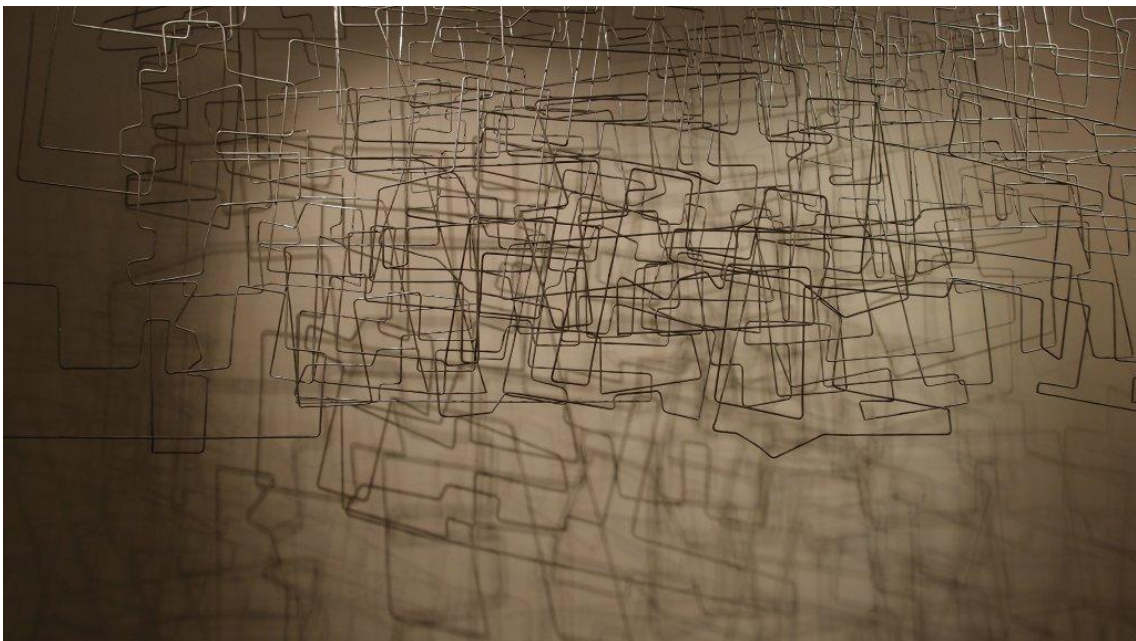


Fig.112. Close-up photo of *The Edging Space*, 2011. (for information on the artwork, see Fig.101)

In the majority of my works I have selected building materials commonly used in Hong Kong's construction industry such as galvanized steel and wood. These materials come from nature and have a strong linkage to the architectural/interior works that I am

involved with as an architect. I retained the raw texture of the galvanized mild steel and wood without any protective paint or color treatment. I have also integrated a metal chain-link fencing material, often used to fence off Crown and abandoned land in Hong Kong in the artwork. This material is tends to be overlooked and neglected; however, its common existence in many corners of the city imbue it with a unique expression of the character of Hong Kong and strongly represents my perception of the city.

Chapter 5 Conclusion

Summary

The outcome of my studio research investigation, as illustrated in Chapter 4, has revealed the embodiment of my perception of the cityscape. As a conclusion to this research project, I will summarize the overall findings of the project in relation to the three research questions that I raised in Chapter 1.

5.1 Why and How the city has the potential to become a viable subject matter for the creation of art?

The modernization and rapid development of contemporary cities is a source of inspiration to many contemporary art practitioners. Zhan Wang and Chen Shaoxiong are deeply affected by the disappearance of the traditional communities. Kacey Wong is inspired by the city's environment and its inherent social problems, including the living conditions of its many inhabitants. Danny Lee takes an interest in the conflict between nature and increasing city development. Warren Leung sets out to perceive the city of New York as a stranger. Slinkachu's work provokes us to experience the city from both micro and macro perspectives. To many people, Hong Kong's overly dense development does not create an ideal environment to live and the uniform appearance of buildings, devoid of any outstanding character or sense of identity, make this city, for many people, an unappealing place to reside. At the same time, the old character of Beijing is vanishing at an alarming speed with skyscrapers emerging everywhere. I have personally witnessed these changes and share the feelings of many contemporary artists about the disappearance of the old neighbourhoods. However, I do have another perspective to my perception of these

two cities. To me, one can always discover hidden and unique characteristics in the city no matter how bland and uniform its appearance may appear. I treasure the old neighbourhood communities, yet at the same time, I am fascinated by the development of the skyscrapers. It is for this reason that I take the time to stroll around the city through both the old traditional neighbourhoods and the newly developed districts with an intuitive visual perspective rather than looking through the eye of an architect to study the architecture and the city landmarks. This process enables me to respond to the visual dynamic of the city with an artistic eye rather than limiting my focus to the functional aspects. As a consequence I find inspiration in the appearance of both the old and the new cityscapes. I believe the formation of these cityscapes is the consequence of continuous transformations that have accumulated over decades or centuries. It is clear that many contemporary art practitioners explore current social issues surrounding city development in the creation of their artwork. However, my attention in my own practice is focused on the visual dynamics of the city as I believe that the social issues are largely ephemeral and can be addressed in terms of economic or political policy by other professionals.

5.2 What are the possible representational art forms that can be derived from the context of the city and urban environment?

My artwork involves both the interaction with the physical cityscape and the transformation of the cityscape and both are strongly embedded in the spatial context. The *interaction with the cityscape* series are presented in two-dimensional pictorial formats while the *transformation of the cityscape* series involves three-dimensional sculptural objects within the context of abstract representation. Whilst

my employment of a city sky pattern may be considered analogous to the artworks of Warren Leung, his artworks are more focused within the context of pictorial formats or object based sculpture, while the development of my own artworks has engaged with specific issues relating to spatial context. I have explored potential options for my artworks employing multi-reflection techniques within a multi-layered setting; the relationship of the solid and the void and the contrast of light and shadow. The placement of the artworks has also undergone considerable variation, utilizing both a single object, and larger groupings. In *Of Other Spaces* and *the World* I demonstrated the play of reflections of the cityscape with multiple angles and fragmented images which illustrate the distinct difference between my works and those referenced artists whose work focuses on distorted reflections from stainless steel surfaces. The mode of presentation has undergone a transition from a reliance on the plinth, to free standing objects and finally to suspension from the ceiling, as illustrated in *Of Other Spaces*, *About Improvisation 5* and *Of Edging Space*.

5.3 What messages are embodied in the artworks for the viewers to perceive?

Everyone can encounter the unique qualities of the city by a direct, physical engagement with it, whether it is in the old community or in the newly developed districts. The city is not merely represented by a particular physical landmark or image, but can transcend to a metaphysical sensation through the experience of wandering the streets or viewing artworks inspired by the cityscape for contemplation. My perspective does not only focus on the old traditional habitats, but also includes the new and modern developments, as I always anticipate how the new developments will inevitably become old one day. I agree that the

traditional buildings should be preserved with a careful study of their historical value, architectural significance, structural stability and hygienic conditions. At the same time, I also support new development for the growth and planning of the economy. The merits of the old communities should be retained and integrated with the new development.

With this solid foundation of research into the cityscape, the exploration of art forms in a spatial context can be extended beyond the life and scope of this project. The essence of the city, not just represented by a landmark, but laid out in the collective memory of the development of the city while incorporating its resulting appearance, forms the primary source and focus for the exploration of this project. The idea of multi-reflection; multi-layering; experimenting with the relationships between the solid and the void and the contrast of light and shadow will become a vital source for the ongoing development of my artwork beyond this project.

Articles Bibliography

Books

1. Bacon, Edmund. *Design of Cities*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1978.
2. Berger, John and Mohr, Jean. *Another way of telling*. New York: Vintage Book, 1995.
3. Berger, John. *Ways of Seeing*. London: Penguin Book, 1972.
4. Benjamin, Walter. *Reflections*. New York: Schocken Books, 2007.
5. Benjamin, Walter. *The Arcades Projects*. Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press, 1999.
6. Brett, Jones and Leung Chi-wo. *Materia Prima: a Hong Kong-Melbourne Art Exchange*. Hong Kong: Parasite Art Space, 2000.
7. Botton, Alain de. *The Architecture of Happiness*. London: Penguin Books, 2006.
8. Bonnemaïson, Sarah and Eisenbach, Ronit. *Installations by Architects*. New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2009.
9. Cassirer, Ernst. *An Essay on Man*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1944.
10. Choi, Wing-sze, Alice. *Sculpture of Reflections. The Art of Danny Lee Chin-fai*. Hong Kong: Asia One Books, 2011.
11. Clarke, David. *Reclaimed Land Hong Kong in transition*. Hong Kong: HKU Press, 2002.
12. Gutierrez, Laurent and Portefaix, Valerie. *Mapping HK*. Hong Kong: Map Book, 2000.
13. Gutierrez, Laurent and Portefaix, Valerie. *Hong Kong a moment of transition*. Hong Kong: Map Book, 1998.

14. Hobbs, Robert. *Hong Kong Now!*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997.
15. *Housewarming*. Hong Kong: Parasite Art Space, 2003.
16. *Home*. Hong Kong: Parasite Art Space, 1999.
17. Huyssen, Andreas. *Other Cities Other Worlds, Urban Imaginaries in a Globalizing Age*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2008.
18. Klanten, Robert, Lukas Feireiss. *Beyond Architecture. Imaginative Buildings and Fictional Cities*. Berlin: Gestalten, 2009.
19. Koon, Wai-bong. *Reworking the Classics*. Hong Kong: Academy of Visual Arts, Hong Kong Baptist University, 2011.
20. Koolhaas, Rem and Mau Bruce. *Small, Medium, Large, Extra-Large*. New York: Monacelli Press, 1995.
21. *Le Corbusier Art and Architecture- A life of Creativity*. Tokyo: Mori Art Museum, 2007.
22. Lee, Leo Ou-fan. *City between Worlds*. London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008.
23. Li, Tim. *Dialogue with the Bed*. Hong Kong: Hulu Concept Ltd, 2009.
24. Miles, Malcolm. *Art Space and the City. Public Art and Urban Features*. New York: Routledge, 1997.
25. Rossi, Aldo and Eisenman, Peter. *The Architecture of the City*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1982.
26. Rosenau, Helen. *The Ideal City in its Architectural Evolution*. New York: Methuen & Co. Ltd, 1983.
27. Sharr, Adam. *Heidegger for Architects*. New York: Routledge, 2007.
28. Vine, Richard. *New China New Art*. London: Prestel Publishing Ltd., 2008.

29. Walker, Joan. *Hong Kong-The growth of city*. United Kingdom: Compendium, 2008.
30. Wei, Ping. *Junction-Architectural Experiment of Chinese Contemporary Art*. Beijing: China Architecture and Building Press, 2002.
31. Will, Self. *Little People in the City -The street art of Slinkachu*. London: Boxtree, 2008.
31. Wong, Kacey. *Displaced Space*. Hong Kong: Object Factory, 2001.
32. Wong, Kacey. *Drift City*. Hong Kong: Object Factory, 2003.
33. Wong, Kacey and Mak, Yim-king, Kathy. *Drift City 10 Years, 2000*. Hong Kong: Asia One Books, 2010.
34. Zhan, Wang. *The New Suyuan Stone Catalogue*. New York: Charta Books Ltd, 2011.

Articles

1. Chan Wing-yee, Joyce. *Warren Leung Chi Wo: Discovering Possibility*, Towards the Global course of the Department of Fine Arts: the University of Hong Kong, 2005.
2. Chen Shaoxiong, *Why I take street photos of Guangzhou*, 1999.
3. Chen Shaoxiong, *Collective Memory – Cityscapes*, 2006.
4. Hou Hanru, *Chen Shaoxiong, From Portable Streets to Private Diplomacy*, 2009.
5. Jiao, J.J., *Preliminary Study on Impact of Land Reclamation on Regional Groundwater Regime*, 2002.

Websites

1. Chen Shaoxiong, <http://www.chenshaoxiong.net>
2. Leung Chi-wo, <http://leungchiwo.com>
3. Lim, William, <http://cl3.com>
4. Wong, Kwok-choi, Kacey, <http://www.kaceywong.com>